

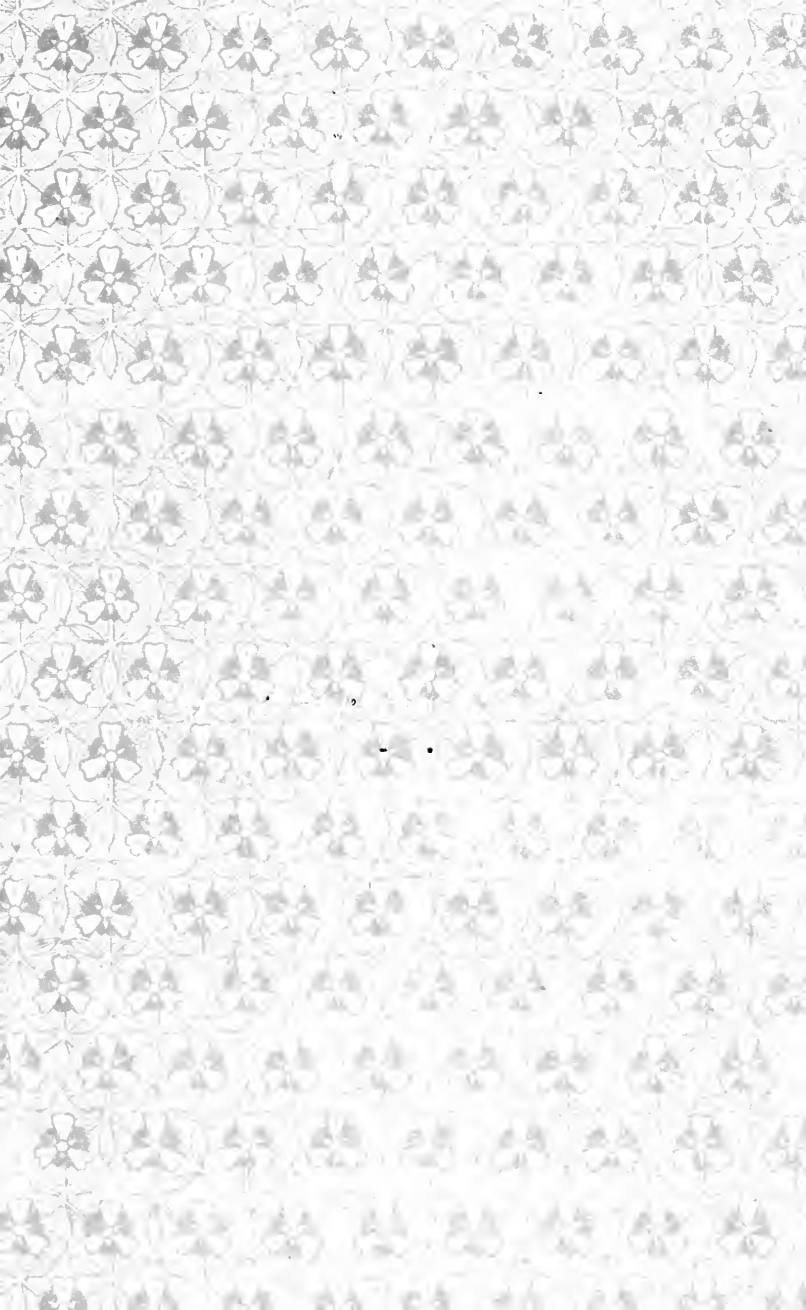
LOVE
AND LIKING

BY
THE AUTHOR OF
TIT FOR TAT



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LOVE AND LIKING.



LOVE AND LIKING.

A Novel.

BY

M. E. SMITH,

AUTHOR OF

"TIT-FOR-TAT," "IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN," "THE PITY OF IT,"
ETC., ETC.

"Tell me, where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart, or in the head;
How begot, how nourished?"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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LOVE AND LIKING.

CHAPTER I.

“A word spoken is an arrow let fly.”

MRS. TIMS' eyes followed her affable lodger with a puzzled look, such a look as the crow in the fable might have had when it saw the fox disappear with the piece of cheese in its mouth. It was past eleven when Mrs. Aylmere reached the baths, which were situated under a sandy knoll on the shore. She had only intended to reconnoitre, and perhaps invest in half-a-dozen tickets for tepid shower-baths; but tempted by a notice that a “professor of hydropathy, with a trained staff, administered Turkish baths in the graduated order of the system as observed in the East,” she determined to submit her travel-tired body to the process.

On entering the sweating-room, to use its technical appellation, clad solely in a voluminous and loose-flowing robe of unadorned chintz, she found two of the pallets occupied. She chose for hers one on the opposite side, and lying down closed her eyes.

In a little she heard a rich sweet voice from one of the pallets say :

“How long have you been here, dear Mrs. Beaumorris?”

“Fully half-an-hour,” was the drowsy reply.

“Half-an-hour! Good patience, I have only been five minutes and I’m thinking of ringing.”

Mrs. Aylmere could see the speakers without turning her head.

The beauty hardly appeared to advantage. Her robe was a yellow-green, and she was deadly pale; art is impossible in the preliminary chamber of a Turkish bath. Her hair had been gathered up by the attendant into an uncompromising knot on the top of the head, and the long, full, shrouding garment hid the contour of her supple figure. She lay

in the regulation attitude, prone on her back, an attitude prohibitive of pose, even had there been a provocative opportunity for her favourite artifice, which, in the absence of the male element, there was not. Her eyes were closed, and the face, whose attraction lay in the varying play of its features and its seductive and ever-changing expressiveness, showed angular and disillusionizing.

Mrs. Aylmere could scarcely credit that she looked on the celebrated beauty Creamy Beaumorris. With natural partiality she pictured her pretty Judy in a similar situation, but wondered at the same time, with a dumb questioning of her own power to discriminate, how Judy could claim a title to even prettiness, if that pallid, heavy-jowled, and by no means fine-featured face was considered a model of beauty.

"Don't," said Creamy in answer to her impatient companion.

"Why?"

"It is not time."

"I don't think they understand the thing. Do you know any one who has tried it here?"

“Oh, yes; Miss Sybella Egbert renews her youth here daily, and Major Tyler tried to call back Europe to his visage three times a week—couldn’t afford more.”

“Results neither you nor I require,” and the lately impatient speaker raised herself on her elbow and turned her head half round in the direction of the beauty, ready for a good gossip.

“The rival beauties,” said Mrs. Aylmere to herself. “Why, Judy wrote me they were always ‘sparring,’ as she called it; they seem very good friends. Perhaps, as Judy would say, it is because they are *au naturel*.” She then managed to get an unobserved look at Mrs. Trelawney. “I can understand *her* being a beauty,” she thought, “but still she can’t hold a candle to Judy; it’s all the make-up; but there really is something to make up *on* there.”

And she was right. It was a magnificent form that in its impulsive twists and turns set at naught the regulation attitude so rigorously observed by its rival, and like a voluptuous cat only half-pleased with

its lair, yet too lazy to seek another, trying in every posture of *abandon* to find the luxurious ease its lithe form and sybarite nature craved. Her hair had rebelled from the knot, and as if in sheer wilfulness streamed in feathery flakes over the head of the pallet on to Creamy's feet, down the pink chintz robe which had fallen to her share, and curled in tangles round the chiselled arm, which had thrust itself in all its naked splendour from out the flimsy covering. Youth and blooming health lit up the large blue Irish eyes, full of sparkle and tenderness, and tinged the delicate face with the exquisite pink of a sea-shell. The lips looked as if they never closed of themselves, but were always on the alert for a merry rejoinder or sly word of blarney. There was perhaps an indication of bone about the cheeks which might, when the fulness of youth had waned, assert itself a little prominently. The mouth, too, owed its comeliness to the mobile lips, with their cherry freshness; it was too large for strict beauty, but the teeth were faultless. The nose also might some day curve too sharply. These

were, however, the unkind possibilities of the future ; the present was Catty's, a present of rich and magnificent loveliness.

"I think I'll send the admiral," she said.

"I wouldn't," replied Creamy, not moving a muscle.

"Why?"

"It might do him good."

Only Catty laughed. "Wherever did Major Tyler get his bronzing?" she asked. "You knew him, didn't you?"

"Tons of years ago. He was fair enough then."

Mrs. Trelawney's quick ear detected a sigh. "He looks to me like a man with a secret. They say he gambles."

"He's throwing for a high stake just now."

"Miss Egbert?"

"Yes."

"Will he win?"

"If Elsie Eber lets him."

"I said he had a secret."

"A secret ceases to be a secret when known to two."

"I wonder he didn't go in for that pretty

little Judy Aylmere. She is heiress presumptive, isn't she, to the Egbert principality? But maybe the old ladies are keeping her for royalty."

"It's a case of now or never. Old ladies are tough. Besides, the pretty Judy's provided for; young Rawson's quite gone."

"And *you* here? I fear you've been off duty. I suppose you threw the major over?"

As Catty said this she looked keenly for an answer, although she could not see all her companion's face.

"Beau," her husband, "can't bear him," was the evasive answer. "He says he is a compromising person to know, and if one does touch the border sometimes, one likes to wear good colours."

"How could Miss Eber interfere with him?"

Creamy rang the bell; she was ready for the second process.

"Listen, you're a woman of the world and can hold your tongue; you'll be here perhaps when I've left; watch things closely. If Miss Eber goes, he'll come back."

“Do you really think she’ll take him?”

“No fools like old ones.”

“Well,” said the magnificent Catty, resuming her horizontal position, and speaking with a light temerity that had in it the *naïveté* of the *ingénue* and the *haut goût* of the coquette, “well, if there’s one thing that I’ve always set my face against, it is sentiment, and, for the matter of that, love, too—intoxicants both and destructive to a career. The chemical mixture muddles the brain and the pure vintage the heart; I vowed myself from the first to total abstinence, and so I married the admiral.”

Creamy laughed as she took the attendant’s hand and rose lazily to her feet.

“I fear you have broken the pledge pretty often,” she said. “I was wiser; *I made my head young.*”

“And your heart *old*. Ah!” she lay at her full length, her heavily-fringed eyes closed, and her hands crossed on her breast like a saint in effigy, “ah, belle Creamy, beware of *renaissance.*”

Mrs. Aylmere watched from under her lids

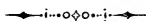
the belle Creamy glide languidly to the douche-room, her long vapoury vesture gathered just closely enough to her figure to define the grace of her movements.

“The very poetry of motion,” was her involuntary tribute of admiration.

Neither Creamy nor her lively companion had caught more than a mere glimpse of Mrs. Aylmere’s face. That lady at her best had little about her to attract attention, and in her shrouding garment, her scanty locks pinned in a knot on the top of her head, she looked merely a middle-aged insignificant female, with nothing to draw more than a passing regard.

“Nobody one knows,” had been Creamy’s inner comment.

“Nobody that knows us,” Catty’s, and then both forgot her very existence, nor did occasion occur to remind them of it, as they were not called on to pass her pallet on their exit to the douche-room.



CHAPTER II.

“Och hon for somebody.”

“Honour and shame from no condition rise ;
Act well your part, there all the honour lies.”

WHEN Lord Le Pole left his sister and sought the sombre wood in which to muse, he was experiencing—what had seemed to him but a brief hour since an impossibility—a new sensation. He could not understand it.

Under the lee of the broad belt of dense growth he stood listening to the faint and fainter sounds of Gloriana's springy canter—he could distinguish it from the cob's decisive trot—conscious of a strange depression, akin to the reaction sometimes experienced after an unwonted ebullition of high spirits.

“A pretty little rustic,” he said to himself, “not at all averse to a flirtation ;” but his heart smote him. “Too natural as yet perhaps to know how to go about it ; she'll

soon learn." The amendment struck him as ungenerous.

Well, what did she choose that song for? Little coquette, playing off her "Allan-a-Dale." What a fool he had been; what could a light nature know of, of—pshaw, the words were idiotic—beings mingling like water; he was sure she laughed—jokes and kisses were what she understood. Once more and to intolerable irritation his heart reproached him. Across his vision came that shy soft glance that had met his at the last line of the exquisite song :

"Why not I with thine?"

Came, too, the rich colour that in the fading light seemed part of the dying splendour of the day. It had bathed her fair young face, had tinged the graceful neck closed in by the jealous collar, nature's tell-tale of the modesty and purity within. Why should she not be gay?—she was but a child. The world had jaundiced him. Yes, she *was* simple and true as she was lovely.

The dark mood was passing away. He strolled on, but beside, not into the wood.

She was but eighteen, his father told him so, a little schoolroom fledgling; heiress, so his father had said, of that fine old Egbert property.

It was expected of him by his family, they spoke of it as a necessity, to marry money; and here was money and family too, in a very agreeable form, he must own.

How her eyes had sparkled at the sight of the books; refined tastes evidently. A year of society, London society, and a good dress-maker, and there would be few like her. That shy gentle look, so different to the assured ease, the hackneyed coquetries of the patent beauties of the day.

He would train her in needful mannerisms—utter naturalness would be a solecism—but she would be plastic and learn of him.

He had rather liked Lady Ilma Froome; a little more than liked, perhaps.

So had he, at various periods of his nonage, fancied other golden goddesses, only to find them with feet of clay. This little wild-wood fay though, he knew it now, had *looked herself into his heart*.

It was a quaint term ; he had heard it from poor Brace, his valet, who died of consumption, the doctors said, but of a broken heart, he knew, jilted by his humble love, who had, he told his master, “looked herself into his heart.”

Then he remembered the child’s question as he peered into her eyes, and he smiled, repeating to himself her answer, “Eyes are like looking-glasses sometimes ;” he wished that hearts were, too.

Suddenly up from the path beneath, hid somewhat by a low holly, came the air, whistled soft and flute-like, of “Allan-a-Dale.” With a startled look he turned in the direction of the silvery sound, and saw Dicks, the Scotch gardener, whose handsome geranium had but an hour since received its name from the “pretty little rustic,” the unwitting disturber of the *blasé* exquisite’s thoughts. Her song had awakened memories in the Scotchman’s heart, and plodding homewards he sent out the old tune, clear and true, in the quiet twilight.

A look half of contempt, half of chagrin,

settled on the young man's slightly heavy brow as he walked back to the house, quickening his steps to get beyond the sound of the obnoxious air. It seemed, so he thought, a mocking answer to his rash wish "that one little heart he knew of could be like a looking-glass."

The last words of the song came back to him ; he knew them well :

" And she fled to the forest to hear a love-tale,
And the youth it was told by was Allan-a-Dale."

" Little coquette," he said to himself, " she has begun early ;" and then he wondered what manner of man this Allan-a-Dale was.

There was a stranger at dinner that evening, Mr. Raymont, Lord Albany's solicitor. His presence was unexpected by Lord Le Pole. Had he been informed of his arrival he would probably have absented himself, not from any personal objection to Mr. Raymont—he rather liked him than otherwise—but from inherent distaste of business details, and these, he knew, would be discussed *ad nauseam* when Lady Margaret had withdrawn.

“Le Pole,” said his father as the door closed on his daughter’s receding skirts, “Mr. Raymont’s visit has to do with you exclusively this time. Sir Oscar Pierce is dead.”

Le Pole paused a decorous moment, slightly elevating his eyebrows as in mild and indifferent surprise, and said :

“Sudden, I suppose. I saw him at Ascot on the Cup day.”

“Yes, he had a fit of apoplexy while dining at the House, and died before they could take him home.”

“Ah! Then Oxminster is vacant?”

“Yes, an unexceptionable opportunity, Mr. Raymont says; if we manage well you may walk the course.”

“My dear father, if I am to enter public life I prefer my credentials from a county, my own if feasible. Only imagine canvassing a borough!”

Lord Le Pole’s refined features looked, as far as their natural impassiveness permitted, unutterable disgust.

“I should prefer it, too,” replied his father, “but even if chance offered we could not

avail ourselves of it. A county election is a costly affair."

"And I think," said Mr. Raymont, "that we can secure Oxminster for five hundred pounds. Beyond a few speeches you will really have no personal work in the matter; where there is no contest an election is a very commonplace piece of business. Sir Oscar was returned without opposition."

"That was because of his local influence. Why, in the first place, he made the borough, you may say, by his enterprise. He was a genius in his way, nor was his genius barren; what it conceived it brought forth. He saw the advantages the town offered for factories and trades—a fine river and a railway junction—and he bought up every acre of land he could get hold of. Then he built his factories, and now his soap washes and his patent hucka-back dries millions. After a while he built streets of model cottages for his labourers, and squares, terraces and villas for the rising community. But for Sir Oscar Pierce Oxminster would never have been important enough for a borough. And the wonder of it

all was the man was a conservative and a gentleman. Are you sure, Mr. Raymont, that the place *is* conservative? It was not on a political basis that it returned Sir Oscar. It has a very radical newspaper."

"My lord," answered the man of business, "if you are in Oxminster the day after to-morrow—to-morrow is the funeral—and pledge yourself to hold fast by the colours that have fallen from the dead man's hand, and to make it your pride and earnest endeavour to be always at the front in the cause of civil and religious liberty and the rights of man, and to drag effete and venal monopolies at the chariot-wheels of progress, I pledge you my word you will carry the day without a demurrer. The only man you need have feared is Sir Janitor Tomlinson, and he is too old—he is eighty if he is a day. He is an uncompromising radical, but very crafty. He was an Oxminster boy and made his own way. He is very mean, and yet he gave the town its park, its working men's college, its hospital, a conventicle and a church. It would have taken a constituency with sound

conservative convictions to have rejected such a benefactor, and political convictions of any kind I do not claim for Oxminster. But Sir Janitor is shunted and the line is clear. You have only to strike the iron while it is hot, and the day is your own. You stand pledged to absolutely no creed, and can follow your bent. So that you have a seat in Parliament, it is little matter whether it is for an obscure borough or a great county; your eventual place is the Upper House, and with that *in posse* you require no adventitious accompaniment for the Commons. If you were a large-estated squire's son, or the squire himself, it would be very different. Then it might be *infra dig.* to represent any constituency but that of your own county, unless you were going in for a political career, and then of course it would be a seat at any price."

Lord Le Pole had listened attentively. His face wore a slightly contemptuous look, expressive of distaste for not only the proposition itself, but the arguments used to render it acceptable.

"I am afraid I must disappoint you, father,"

he said, turning to Lord Albany. "I could not sneak into Parliament. If I canvass a constituency it must be on a creed. Generalities are specious lies; I would not pledge myself to any man's colours—clap-trap as the phrase may sound; 'measures, not men,' is my motto alone."

"What can the herd know of politics?" said the earl disdainfully. "He is the honest man, the true humanitarian, who, pledged to general principles of civil and religious liberty, draws his own convictions from these principles, and does for the people what he thinks best, not what *they* think best."

"The people, my lord," returned the young man quietly, "are no longer sheep to be driven; they must be *led*, they must know their leader's voice, and a stranger will they not follow."

"Leading and driving with a clever shepherd are the same thing. Autocracy and democracy are convertible terms," said Mr. Rayment. "You are really making a mountain out of the ghost of a mole-hill. But you are a conservative, I presume?"

“That is just what I am not sure of.”

“All the more reason for you to hold by broad principles then, and that is all that is demanded of you ; but in any case you are not opposed to the present government ? ”

“No, decidedly not.”

Lord Albany, who had turned a stern look on his son, gave a sigh of infinite relief.

“Because I believe that all reform to be sound must be slow. Everything that is not ephemeral is slow. Those laws that have helped the development of civilization, that are actually bound up in the constitution of the country, cannot be changed in a day without shaking society to its centre. I believe that the present government represents true liberality. Conservatism pure and simple is a thing of the past.”

“I do not think the Oxminster electors would quarrel with you,” persisted Mr. Raymont. “And, as I said, it is an exceptional opportunity. There is certain to be a general election in a year, or at most eighteen months, and once you have taken root it will be difficult to find an

opponent. Men are holding back for the big tussle. A man does not care to throw away five or six thousand, which a contest would cost, with the certainty of another in so short a time."

The young lord said nothing. He sat rolling his wine-glass about backwards and forwards, not as if he was of doubtful mind, but simply indifferent.

"You would please me, Le Pole," at last said his father stiffly, "if you give the matter your careful consideration, and let me know your decision in the morning. I am not without influence in the Cabinet, though I have never bid for office, and I think if you were *housed* you might be *boxed*. You have aims, and not ignoble ones, I know; do not let your youth slip by in dreams."

Mr. Raymont helped himself to some claret and then followed his noble client into the smoking-room. For some minutes the two men sat together in the deep window, which was open, smoking in silence.

Mr. Raymont was a little more than a respectable and trustworthy solicitor and

land agent; he was a gentleman by birth and culture, but, in what he was wont to term the "abstract relations of life," a man with no pronounced convictions. Mr. Raymont was socially ambitious, not for himself, but his children, his eldest son in especial; therefore his chief end in life was to make money. He had ready for replanting in its native soil a good old name, a name which the changes of fortune and time had rooted out from the time-honoured growths of a pleasant southern county and dibbled in among the vulgar and indigenous increments of city commerce. Centuries before a Le Pole had become even a possibility of the future, the Raymonts had won their spurs. The quiet, steady-going, unobtrusive attorney of Lincoln's Inn knew and held fast the traditions, but he never spoke of them, not, at least, outside his home-circle. He had found it though, astute as he was, a very difficult matter to observe a middle course. There were clients who on the subject of politics demanded of their legal adviser something more than honest service; they looked for sympathy, if not a perfect con-

cordance with particular views. The difficulties in which this unreasonableness, as he deemed it, was continually placing him came to a head on the occasion of two parliamentary candidates for indifferent boroughs of opposing politics simultaneously seeking to engage him as their electioneering agent. He had then to do a thing against which his nature rebelled—to turn away money; and as the conservatives were in power he took over the tory letters of marque. This decided him on an act repugnant to his personal feelings; he determined to take a partner, and one with liberal tendencies. The necessity for this had often pressed itself upon him, so extensive had his practice grown to be; but with the hope, as indicated, of recovering for his son the old family status among the landed gentry, he had been averse to found a firm with which the honoured patronymic would be irretrievably associated.

Such a partner was found in the person of Mr. Abram Rout, who under two aliases owned two country papers of very advanced views. These views, however, were not in-

corporated in the deed of partnership. The conjunction carried on the business on the same political basis of no politics at all. But democratic clients found their needs fully satisfied in the sympathetic fustian of Mr. Abram Rout, a fustian which prolonged interviews set to the advantage, on the side of the firm, of the bill of costs. It soon became apparent that a balancing power was wanted in the conjunction, or, to put it more accurately, that, to preserve in the senior representative's hand that power of balance, a third partner, and of conservative principles, would be necessary. This want was also supplied with facility, and the name of Aaron Rally made the firm a trilogy. So while Abram Rout was ever ready at the instance of a reformer for a gyration in mid-air unimpeded by prohibitive matter, Mr. Aaron Rally was always at hand in the advent of a fossil squire to unfurl the flag of faded blue and hoist it over a breach in the ancient landmarks.

Mr. Raymont was thus enabled to preserve in his own person the happy mean, and was

not again obliged "to turn money away." In course of time he came to be particularized as "the middle man," a term of happy appropriateness. And so in the mixing of things it had come to pass more than once that the respectable and much-esteemed firm of Raymont, Rout, and Rally had carried to victory on simultaneous occasions, though in different places, a staunch liberal and a rabid conservative.

The junior partner had a facile pen and what is known in journalism as a good connection, and it was equally at the service of Whig and Tory. Gradually the firm was acquiring the reputation of clever and successful electioneering agents, and if sometimes a defeated candidate would sneer at the "unscrupulous Jew partners," Mr. Raymont himself was so far above suspicion of anything but a simple straightforward line of conduct that the sneer was set down to disappointment, and the reputation of the firm for sharpness and generalship went up in the scale.

"We shall have a little difficulty with Le

Pole," at last said Lord Albany, breaking silence.

"And there is no time to be lost," returned his companion. "However, it seems to me that if we can manage an address that will enunciate some special doctrines acceptable to either side, his scruples will be satisfied. There is one cause of thankfulness—*he has no notions*, he has no 'mission;' in fact there is nothing to undo. He has evidently been a mere looker-on at the game political, and I doubt if he knows anything of the licensing question; *there* might have been a difficulty. There are a few small bills before the House, of little general interest, but which happen to bear locally upon Oxminster—something about municipal rating is one, I know—and if these have prominent place the local politician will be carried, and then it will be plain sailing; of foreign policy or even the large measures of home legislation, Oxminster knows little and cares less. It has had enough to do to make itself to mind, what it looks on as its neighbour's business. Rally does say it is waking up, but we are in time."

Mr. Rayment did not add that the *Weekly Sun*, a violent radical organ and the one paper as yet of Oxminster, had for its proprietor Mr. Abram Rout. Neither did he say that the leading article for the current week and the obituary notice of the town's respected and lamented benefactor, its late member, was from the facile pen of Mr. Aaron Rally, and that the tone was mild and magnanimous—but then men of business are naturally reticent.

“I tell you candidly, Rayment,” said Lord Albany, relaxing his stiffness as he was used when enjoying a post-prandial cigar with his confidential man of business, “I tell you candidly, that if the thing was not to be so hurried, as far as Le Pole is concerned it would fall through. *He is waking up*. He will not go very far astray, however, while Tancred is at the helm ; he believes in him.”

“Ah,” the solicitor took his cigar between his fingers and knocked off some ashes, “I don't know which are most misleading, creeds or men,” and he replaced the fragrant weed in his mouth.

It was past eleven before Lord Albany and

his guest left the smoking-room ; ugly-looking deeds and papers were gone into, and much anxious converse ensued, converse in which the names of Aylmere and Egbert recurred not unfrequently. As they parted for the night the earl said, looking anxious and worn, "I could have wished this election had occurred a month hence. They are not likely to meet now for another month at best ; that is if he agrees to stand."

"Strange," thought the attorney as he followed his host to the door, "very strange that in this hitherto aimless life two such possibilities should have occurred in one day, a love and a career."



CHAPTER III.

Where more is meant than meets the eye."

MR. RAYMONT before returning to town the following morning had a short interview with the young lord, in which the latter definitely declined to offer himself for Oxminster, unless on the understanding that he was to be allowed to enunciate his own political creed. This, Mr. Raymont shrewdly suspected, would be simply suicidal.

"My lord," he said, "cannot you make it a matter of faith, and trust your sponsors?"

"No," was the reply ; "if I promise and vow, it shall be in my own person. I have no objection to undertake any matter not affecting the public benefit, but locally important to the borough. I am aware new constituents are essentially important ; they are like Mrs. Poyser's cock, who thought the sun rose on

purpose to hear him crow ; but I will not let the mass of the electors fancy me a prophet of Baal when I am on the side of Elijah. I will not halt between two opinions."

"But I understood you to say last night that you did not know if you were a conservative or not. You are not required to hesitate, any more than you are called on to decide. A middle course is often the soundest policy, and if honestly followed leads to the safest results."

Lord Le Pole thought of Messrs. Rout and Rally, and his lip curled.

"I said I was not sure if I was a conservative because I am not sure what the term carries. If it means tory, then I am certainly not one ; not because I have no tory convictions—every man who has a stake in the country such as I have must hold some tory tenets—but because the present head of the government diverges widely from the real principles the name is supposed to represent. Tancred is no tory."

"And you still aver that measures, not men, is the motto."

"And so it is. I would not enter the House pledged to any party, led even by the Duke of Tancred; I must be independent."

"If you are asked crucial questions you cannot give evasive answers," said Mr. Raymont a little warmly, "and Oxminster is strong on Bible if it is not on beer."

"I am for liberty of conscience."

"What of disestablishment? If the rumbling increases in the body of the crater they might pull you up on that."

"Volcanic eruptions gave us mountains," was the young man's slightly ambiguous reply.

"We are not prepared for more excrescences," said the lawyer, just a little sardonically.

"Mr. Raymont," Lord Le Pole spoke calmly, if not kindly, "I am aware that is a question we must face soon. At present my answer would be that I am ready to go with the times, and that when I see the sense of the country calls for that measure I will vote for it."

"And you would!"

“My good sir, there is no standing still in nature, and society is but nature in action.”

“You forget that there is going back. A garden may become a wilderness.”

Mr. Rayment spoke in a warning voice.

“Not if order accompanies change.”

“My lord,” he said, speaking earnestly, “the people are only waking up to their power. A young constituency can be trained if they come to have faith in their leader. You have faith in the nation’s leader, and yet by your own showing he carries his goods into port under false colours; with every rallying cry of *in statu quo* he makes a step forward. But the true weal of the country is in his heart. He knows what is best for it, and that is often just what it does not want, and he lets results speak for him. If you stand for this little borough a ‘needy knife-grinder’ may be prompted to ask your sentiments on the Licensing Bill; all that he and his instigators care for is more beer; or some wretched mill-worker with a remunerative family may challenge you on compulsory education; all he wants is his hapless children’s earnings; so if you are

determined on a creed you need not stand ; the place will be swept into the slough of utter radicalism, and an opportunity, which does not come too often in a man's life, of a distinct public good, will be lost to you for ever. However, if you should see your way to fight, telegraph to me in town ; it may not be too late between this and Friday. A certainty would be secured if we struck at once. Only for the reverence in which the late Sir Oscar was held, placards would have been over the place by this ; but with black bunting flying, the ' Dead March in Saul ' for the church and improve-the-occasion services in the conventicles, a red or blue bill-sticker would get small quarter till the funeral is over."

"There must be something sound in Oxminster," thought the young man to himself as he strolled towards the stables, leaving a message with Mr. Raymont for his father to the effect that he would think the matter well over and see him in the evening. "They were grateful to their real benefactor, and gratitude nowadays is a rare virtue. It would be something to keep them in the right way. Old

Raymont is foxy though, but he is right ; the *mob* have no creed, and what their rights *are* they neither understand nor care for."



CHAPTER IV.

“Rises from a cloud of smoke to light.”

JUDY paid another visit with the squire, but as she had gone with intent to lunch she returned in time for Dulsie's afternoon tea, which she usually dispensed in the only room guiltless of oak panelling, the bright little boudoir already mentioned. This room opened into the conservatory. It had been the late Mrs. Egbert's favourite chamber, and one into which only intimates had admission. The squire loved it. The chintzes had been renewed many a time since the lamented lady's death, but the pattern of the cloth was the same, and the adjustment of the furniture and pictures as she had arranged them. Nothing had been added, nothing taken away. Violets, her favourite flower, still bloomed under the window the year round, and between the lace curtains the crested and gilded cage still

swung, in which a bullfinch, which on death had always a successor, still piped the same soft German tune. No outer change was here. Could the thirty years that had, to the squire, crept so laggardly by since the day when he had with his own hands closed the dimmed eyes for ever, could these weary years have rolled back but for one day, and she have glided in as was her wont in fragile gentleness and sunk back once more in the low easy-chair by the bright window, she would but have given life to the shadowy embodiment of her loving husband's faithful memory, which often seemed to fill again the familiar seat. Nay, so vivid at times seemed her presence the squire would ask himself if it were not still the morbid dread of losing her, which during her years of fading had haunted him, that still filled his heart and gave to her reality the illusiveness of a vision. But was it all a vision? Is there never during time a rent in the veil between the spirit-life here and that beyond, through which they that would come to us may pass, or we, for one dreamful hour, go to them? Death's power is ultimate. One

link in the golden chain of life is not broken, for death is but the "Crown of Life," and all the trophy the victorious grave can claim is earth's poor vesture. Soul may still thrill to soul, and voices hushed to our mortal ear whisper in our hearts. Then, filled by the sense of the loved presence, on the yearning eyes the spirit-form may gleam for a transitory moment, and merging back into light leave the darkness all bereft of its gloom and loneliness of its despair. Time, on love such as theirs was, could never lay an effacing finger ; in its purity and holiness it was divine, and so itself part of that great Divinity to whom a thousand years are but as a watch in the night.

On Judy the intensity and faithfulness of this great love had left their impress. Even now she never thought lightly of love, and young as she was she had come to speculate on the quality that had bound two souls in such an indissoluble tie for ever. Then in fear her heart would fail her, and she would send up a silent prayer, which was more of a reverent breathing than an utterance, that she might never

bring to that great sacrament a sordid motive or an ignoble aspiration, nor there join hands with one a whit below her lofty ideal. Nothing that was halt or maimed or blind would she bring to the altar hallowed by that divine fire. Ah, how often yearnings such as these are but the emanations of a poetic nature, which, for use in the work-a-day world, are never "clothed upon." But not so with Judy. Her longings were the outcome of a pure spirit shrinking from things false and mean, the stretching out of feeble hands for strength to carry through high resolves, which yet, when the good time should come, might receive, to outward seeming, a very commonplace embedment.

Judy, on returning from her visit, had retired to her room at once to make her light and simple evening toilet. The day had been warm to exhaustion, and she was glad to put on a cool gown. This evening she chose a pale blue muslin with a slight train, and sleeves reaching only to the elbow. Soft white mechlin lace was filled in on her bosom. Her hair was coiled low on her head, but little

feathery flakes and curls rested airily on her brow. They were simply rebels, who asserted their liberty persistently, setting at defiance every contrivance to reduce them to order. To keep them in countenance Judy had dotted in through the thick close-lying masses of hair little wilful sprigs of forget-me-nots, a slightly eccentric but altogether enchanting coiffure; a large bunch of the same flowers nestled in her breast. It was, take it all in all, a careless toilet, made in a spirit of lazy gaiety.

When she entered the boudoir Dulsie was seated at the tea-table, her old garden-hat on her head, and company garden-gloves beside her. She was not alone, and she was doing her successful best to be agreeable to her companion, Lord Le Pole—a very successful best, seeing her chief subject of converse had been Judy, a text to which her visitor had kept her pretty close. Judy stopped in the open door with a start of surprise.

“You did not expect to see me so soon again?” said the young man. “I came with a message to Mr. Egbert from my father, and I was beginning to fear I should lose the reward

of my trouble," and he smiled as he looked earnestly at her, so earnestly that the roses on her cheek deepened and her lids fell, but she gave him her hand, frankly answering:

"The unexpected always surprises," then turning to Dulsie she asked where the squire had gone, saying she would go for him. Judy was not at her ease, and she knew it.

"My absurd head," she thought; "I know I am a guy."

Dulsie said the squire would return directly, adding that Lord Le Pole had already seen him.

Then Judy with a cup of tea subsided into a chair in the open window. The lace curtains partially shaded her from notice, and she rapidly recovered her self-possession. Lord Le Pole brought her some bread and butter.

"Are you going to the flower-show next week?" he asked.

"I am afraid not," she replied; "we are all at Sandycot, and Nettlethorp is not very come-at-able from there."

"Do you like Sandycot?"

“Oh, yes, it is such a gay little place; no stiffness about it and no excursion trains.”

“A disadvantage it will never be troubled with, I should say.”

“I don’t know that. Some one was suggesting races on the sands. Sandycot beach is unrivalled for extent and smoothness.”

“Races at Sandycot, Judy,” cried Dulsie. “That is Mr. Rawson, I am sure; he will ruin the place.”

Judy’s tell-tale face flushed as she answered, just a little tartly, “I am sure Ned—that is, Mr. Rawson, I mean—would be the last person to——”

“To what, Judy?” cried the squire, entering the room with some letters in his hand. “What would your Gamaliel be the last person to do?”

“Cousin Egbert, I wish you wouldn’t be so absurd; besides, Mr. Rawson is not a radical.”

Only the squire understood this little cranky peech, and he laughed a low chuckling laugh at his success in what he termed “springing Judy,” a sly amusement he much affected.

“Judy was telling us that there is to be a racecourse on Sandycot beach, so I supposed that Mr. Rawson was the promoter, that is all,” explained Dulsie.

It was hard on Judy. She felt Lord Le Pole’s eyes covertly watching her, and biting her lips she held her peace.

“Never mind, Judy,” cried the squire, “there will be no races if they depend on Ned Rawson. He has other fish to fry. His uncle, Sir Janitor Tomlinson, wants him to stand for Oxminster.”

“Oh,” cried Judy, fairly off her guard, “I am so glad, he will have a career at last,” and she came from her retreat animated and expressive.

Lord Le Pole slipped into her vacant place and gazed on the undulating hills, a vexed look in his eyes, but a quickening resoluteness in his firm-set mouth. The conversation at the tea-table was brisk; letters were opened and discussed. One was from Mrs. Aylmere to her daughter. For the moment the presence of a stranger seemed forgotten; for the moment the stranger seemed to forget the

presence of others. Out on the sloping downs and on to the towering hills his regards strayed. The lights and shadows of coming evening were flitting and gliding from hedge to green sward, the rookery which was nigh was vocal with din, and from the distance came the whistle of the cow-boy, the sheep-bells' erratic tingle, and a faint echo of village bells. But Lord Le Pole heard none of these peaceful sounds; his ears, his heart, nay, his whole senses vibrated to but one ringing voice, which rang triumphantly, he thought, in the latter notes of the old song of "Allan-a-Dale."

It was only for a few minutes, not five by clock measured time, that he thus stood, but into those fleeting seconds had been crowded a life's retrospect and a life's resolve, by which to stand or fall.

When he turned at the sound of his name uttered by the squire, the languor, the *insouciance* had gone, and in their place was an eager resoluteness—the waking up had come. In his eyes, too, was a strange expression, as if they had recognized a desired object in the far distance, which he must reach or die.

“May I ring for my horse?” he asked.

The very tone of his voice was changed, yet only Judy of those present felt or noted a difference. She looked at him almost questioningly. As to Dulsie’s expressed wish that he should stay to dinner, he stumbled over excuses relating to his father, stock, and late hours—nothing very consequent.

“Lord Albany can command votes for Oxminster,” said the squire, “but I fear our young friend is an out-and-out radical.”

Judy said not a word, though in her hand she held a letter from her mother, which she had perused, stating that Mr. Rawson’s millionaire uncle had sent for him to contest Oxminster, but that she feared his independent scruples would prevent him from pledging himself to the Liberal party, in which case he would not only lose his chance of a political career, but, what was of far more moment in Mrs. Aylmere’s eyes, his uncle’s favour.

“My father,” said the young man with just a little *hauteur*, “my father is for utter freedom of voting ; but, strange to say, I am offering myself as a candidate for Oxminster.

Mr. Raymont, our solicitor, came to the Grange about the matter last night."

"What?" cried the squire; "that is sudden. On conservative principles of course?"

Judy, whose roses had paled from mental excitement and bewilderment, fixed her eyes on Lord Le Pole's impassive face.

"On a creed at any rate," he answered; "and not radical, you may be sure."

Then Judy spoke a little proudly and vindicatingly, "Mamma says that Mr. Rawson declines a creed; he wishes to be independent."

"And I," returned the young nobleman quickly; with animus, Judy thought, "and I prefer to show my colours," and then his eyes softened as they met hers. "I am sorry my opponent is a friend of yours, but we enter the lists on equal terms."

"Of course," she said, "of course;" and then blushing violently under his earnest gaze, "I do hope though that one of you will win."

The moment she had spoken, the absurdity of her words struck her, and she laughed till the tears came.

“ Thank you for both,” he returned. “ Will you give me a forget-me-not? It shall be my colour for the contest.”

She shook her head, and a sprig fell at his feet.

“ Your head, if not your heart, consents,” he whispered as he lifted it and fastened it in a waistcoat button-hole.

A servant announced the visitor’s horse, and before Judy could remonstrate his adieux were made, and carrying his trophy on his heart he was soon *en route* for home. On his way he stopped at Nettlethorp and telegraphed to Mr. Raymont the following words :

“ You can put me up as a Liberal-Conservative. Will be at Oxminster to-morrow. Opposition probable.”



CHAPTER V.

“ But who shall act the honest lawyer ?

’Tis a hard part that.”

MR. RAYMONT, holding an open telegram in his hand, was giving audience to his two partners, Messrs. Rout and Rally.

“ Then, sir,” said Mr. Rout to his chief, “ you decide in favour of Lord Le Pole ? ”

“ I cannot help myself,” was the answer, given a little petulantly. “ Lord Albany is too old a client to throw over ; besides, though I own the money will be difficult, there are future possibilities that will square my present loss.”

“ I am not exaggerating,” persisted Mr. Rout, “ when I say we are refusing, actually refusing, thousands. I know Sir Janitor well, and the length of his purse, too. His vanity is greater than even his means, as Oxminster’s pretentious charities testify, and to carry his nephew through against a ‘ full-blown Nob,’

as he calls a man with a title, he is good for unlimited cheques. Besides, he is proud of the young man. Could you not say we had compromised you, that we had already pledged the firm to Mr. Rawson's interests?"

"Impossible. The most we can do is to be first in the field and make what capital we can out of the dead man's reputation. I hear the place is like a city of the dead, black bunting flying and shops closed."

"Perhaps, sir," said Mr. Rout hesitatingly, "perhaps it would be as well if I called on Sir Janitor when I go to Oxminster to-night, as I suppose I must; he is a very big fish to throw back into the sea."

"No," returned Mr. Raymont decisively; "he is a sharp business man and appreciates things only on a business basis. Write him a short but civil business letter, and express regret that we are pledged to the conservative candidate. If you call with any palaver, and our man won, we should make an enemy; but if we do our best for our man he will respect us, and if we win he will regret he was late in securing our service."

Mr. Raymont stopped as if he meant to go on, which, after a minute's uncertainty, he did : "And you may add—it can do no harm under the circumstances, it will only be civil—that apart from all business considerations we hope that Oxminster will not fail in gratitude to its benefactor, but whether the dead or the living one we are not called on to specify," and the firm relaxed into a grim smile.

Mr. Rally had received instructions to draw up an electioneering address with strongly-worded general pledges on all as yet undefined measures of social reform, avoiding any special questions.

"Be undefined," concluded Mr. Raymont, "but by no means vague. Use the word 'progress' frequently, and have it set in large capitals. It must be left for Lord Le Pole to declare his lead himself, and that as yet seems to be Tancred and variations, though he fancies it is 'measures, not men.' You may say, too, that Toryism is dead—large capitals there, too, the Earl is an uncompromising Tory—and that the true principles of Conservatism are to be found only in a well-

weighed and lofty Liberalism—large capitals—for Conservatism—when rightly understood and honestly *controlled*—put *controlled* in italics—is simply a religious and resolute maintenance of Law, Order, and Right.”

“I think I am equal to the occasion,” said Mr. Rally demurely; “the strategy of bamboozledom is becoming second nature to me.”

“And this campaign,” added Mr. Raymont, ignoring his partner’s innuendo, “will be a difficult one; our credentials are not full.”

Mr. Rout had been turning over a Bradshaw’s guide.

“I see,” he said, “that Casterham is quite close to Oxminster. Do you not think,” addressing himself to Mr. Raymont, “that it would be as well if I made some inquiry about this Mrs. Tiler, whose bill Miss Eber instructs us to redeem? I happen to know something about her, and quite lately she was very ill. It is just possible she may be dead.”

“That would only confine the obligation to the drawer, Major Tyler, I think. Is he any relation to her?”

"A son, in all but the name, which he adopted to conceal his identity with his father's son," Mr. Rout laughed. "Old Tiler was a very respectable ironmonger; he sold his vote for the commission of his son."

"Very respectable?" repeated Mr. Raymont.

"Political morality has a code of its own. For my part I am of opinion that it raises a poor man's self-respect to know that he has a right which can be appraised at a money value, the only value he understands."

"Well, Rout, you can do so"—Mr. Raymont waived an argument on political ethics—"but as the bill must be redeemed in any case, it seems a little out of our line to interest ourselves in the signees."

"I am an old friend of Miss Eber," was Mr. Rout's answer, "and I gather from her letter that she takes up this bill solely in the interests of the widow Tiler. I have every reason to believe from facts that have come to my knowledge—not in a business way at all—that if the obligation rested solely with Major Tyler he would have to meet it unassisted by Miss Eber. The man is a scoun-

drel. I have written to the holder to see if he will reduce, but I am certain he will not; it gives us a day, however."

"It is getting late gentlemen," said Mr. Raymont; "seven o'clock is an unusual hour for our shutters to be down," and he rose in token that the consultation was over; but at that moment a card was brought to him which he handed silently to his partners, smiling.

"Mr. Rawson!" exclaimed Rally, "how opportune. We must find out if he is as extreme as his uncle."

The firm received their visitor cordially, Mr. Raymont expressing his regret, very sincerely felt, that Sir Janitor's proposal had been made too late for their acceptance, their services having been retained on behalf of their distinguished client, the Earl of Albany.

"What, Lord Le Pole?" said Ned, adding, on receiving an affirming nod, "I knew him at Oxford, but only a little. He posed as a grand seignior there, belonged to no set, kept even the dons at arm's length, went in tremendously for *bric-à-brac*, and was popu-

larly credited with a new suit of clothes every day. He was called the Double X, which stood for Exclusive Exquisite. But he won't have a chance. His father is the most fossilized of all fossil Tories, and anything ultra is in the minority while king Tancred reigns."

"Sir Janitor is ultra," observed Mr. Rally.

"But it does not follow that I am also," returned the young man assertively, "and that is just the point I wished to discuss; however, I am taking up your time for no use now. I only hope my uncle will fall into good hands. Could you not name a safe, I mean a moderate, firm to him?"

"We could not do that under the circumstances," said Mr. Raymont, "but as a rule recommendations of any kind or degree I never give; they are opposed to my line of conduct because they entail outside responsibilities."

The senior partner was always careful, when occasion offered, to particularize his principles in evidence of his line of conduct, which, as has been said, had the reputation of being

without curves. These he left to his able coadjutors, becoming, when an exigency called for such divergences, a sleeping partner.

"I do not fancy," said Mr. Rally, "that any influence would moderate Sir Janitor's views; they are very extreme, but he has a long purse."

The young man flushed haughtily. He opened his lips as if on the point to disclaim, but suddenly remembering that he was in the presence of his opponent's agents, he drew himself in.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, "I regret I have lost you as advisers, but I wish you to understand, and I shall make the electors understand, that I am no sordid tool. What I have to say you will hear when the proper time comes. And remember this, that personally I don't despise my opponent: he has good stuff in him. He only spoke once at the Union, it was on disestablishment, and he began like his father's son and ended like—well, like what his son's father will be, but not yet awhile," and laughing merrily he bowed himself out of the presence chamber.

Mr. Rout followed close, accompanying the light-hearted candidate for Oxminster to his cab, which was in waiting.

“Did you happen to meet a Major Tyler at Sandycot?” he asked.

“Oh yes, often, he left suddenly; a mysterious sort of a fellow; a desperate lady-killer. Do you know anything of him?” And as if struck by the sudden thought he brought up at the end of the passage and looked at his companion.

“Nothing good,” was the reply.

“Then,” said hastily the other, “Squire Egbert ought to be told. The fellow made up to the eldest Miss Egbert. She is sixty, I believe, and I fear it will be a match. You ought to forbid the banns, if you can.”

“I’ll try,” was the cautious answer. “But did no one know him at Sandycot? The place is full, is it not?”

“Not a soul. But he made his way: brass is better than tin sometimes, and he hasn’t much of the latter. He was lucky at *écarté*, and that kept him going.”

Mr. Rout had got the information he wanted. If Elsie and the major had met, it had been as strangers.

“Oh, by-the-by,” he said, stopping Ned as he entered the cab, “just a word; Dibbs and Tipps are a good house. They not only got the renegade Owl through by the skin of his teeth, but gained the day in the petition against him. A very *safe* house is Dibbs and Tipps, and—a word to the wise—I know Sir Janitor well,” here Mr. Rout winked, which might mean jest or earnest; “your best card is the *Nob*; play him against your uncle. So you beat a ‘full blown nob,’ you may sail very close to a Tory wind.”

With a look of disgust, cast on the obtuse Rout, Ned jumped into his cab, nodding a hasty good-bye.

“I’ll run him close,” he said to himself, “but I’ll do it on the square, I won’t touch pitch;” in pursuance of which determination the cab did not stop at the door of Messrs. Dibbs’ office, but landed its fare at the Charing Cross Hotel, from which establishment it soon after conveyed a note to No. 200, Wimpole

Street, the private rooms of Mr. Alexander Quarles, of Messrs. Quarles and Patch, a highly respectable, if old-fashioned, firm of solicitors, whose business *habitat* was in Essex Street, Strand.

The immediate result of the note was that after an hour's consultation with their client an address to the electors of Oxminster was sent to a printing house. A certain notice, comprehensive in its contents, was successfully placed in the night matter of two of the leading dailies, which notice in the morning not a little astonished the wideawake trilogy of Lincoln's Inn, one of whom had the pleasure of reading it while taking his ease at his inn in the recently bereft borough of Oxminster. Seized with a panic, Mr. Rout left his toast and bacon and sought the principal thoroughfare. There he was confronted by huge yellow posters, in which were conspicuous the names of Sir Janitor Tomlinson and Edward Rawson, M.A., with their mutual relations set prominently forth. On the head of the posters was a black medallion containing a regretful tribute to the manes of the late member, who

was described as the city knight's "lifelong and greatly esteemed friend."

Mr. Rout returned to his limp toast and now coagulated bacon fat, experiencing what was to him a very new sensation—an eye opener. He was the victim of a stolen march: not a bill sticker was to be had in Oxminster, they had all gone over to the enemy.



CHAPTER VI.

“ His mother looks from her lattice high,
Why comes he not ? ”

“ Pass on, weak heart, and leave me where I lie ;
Go by, go by.”

MRS. TILER'S habitation was No. 3, Poplar Villas, a humble enough home for the mother of such a dashing *sabreur* as the ex-major of the Dragoons had been, of such a very *comme-il-faut* member of exclusive circles as he now, in his retirement from service, affected to be. Dingy and forlorn as the normal aspect of the house was, to-day it seemed to have received an accession of melancholy, a melancholy which, as he approached it, took the spring out of Mr. Rout's active step but quickened the keenness of his little restless black eyes. A sad and solitary laburnum drooped in the centre of the six-feet square garden in front, which was covered with rank grass and weeds. The

blinds of the windows were down to within an inch or two of the sills, and the windows themselves were open from the top to about the same extent, as if giving entrance to fresh air on protest. The small knocker was tied up in an old black glove. By continuous gentle taps Mr. Rout made his presence known, and the door was cautiously opened by a stern-visaged, poverty-battered female, whose age might have been charitably set down at fifty. She had only lately reached thirty.

“Mr. Rout!” she exclaimed, turning a paler shade of her natural yellow, and then, with a backward look, placing her finger on her lips.

“It is about her illness I have come,” he said; “can I speak to you?”

And without further parley of greeting or questioning, she ushered him in with a warning “Hush!”

But softly as they moved, the strange step struck on the senses of the sick woman, lying on the threshold of death in the meagre chamber overhead. She was listening for a

loved foot, whose tardiness fanned the feverish fire in her blood and chased peace from her failing heart. How often during the weary years that were gone had she so listened? How often, desire satisfied, had that coming been but Dead Sea fruit?

Then came the impatient tinkle of a hand-bell.

“She has heard your step,” said Mr. Rout’s companion; “she is on the watch for my brother;” she uttered the last word with bitter irony. “He telegraphed he was coming yesterday, and she has never closed her eyes. I knew he would not be here till late to-day—the Barton races are going on.”

She then disappeared for a moment to soothe the dying woman with words of hope. She lied to her.

“It is Mr. Burton,” naming a neighbour, “to ask for you; he says he is sure the telegraph people have made a mistake, that Geoffrey meant to come to-day, that there was a *levée* yesterday and he would have to be present, so mother, darling, try and sleep,

you will be fresher when he comes and better able to talk to him."

This was the fiction the pitiful tongue poured into the yearning ear. She was not grim-visaged as she smoothed the pillow and then bent and kissed the wasted face.

"You'll be sure to call me, Nelly," asked the feeble voice, with a quiver of the lip; "it seems so long waiting."

Nelly gave the promise, and had the satisfaction to see the tear-stained weary eyes close in sleep.

"There is no hope, I suppose?" said Mr. Rout to Nelly, when the door of the little sitting-room was again closed.

"None. It is only a question of hours now. The doctor does not think she'll last till sundown."

"Poor woman, a happy release."

Commonplace as the words were, the voice and intent were kind.

"It is about that acceptance I've come," he went on; "I had understood from you that it had been arranged, and that Mrs. Tiler's liability had ceased."

Nelly's lips grew white.

"What acceptance?" she asked. "Not another bill?"

"I know of only one bill," he returned, "the one for two thousand pounds you wrote to me about before Christmas, and which you said was arranged. Davis holds it, has kept it over, I fancy by collusion, and threatens to come down on your mother."

"Why, it was paid." Nelly spoke as if in physical pain. "We made up, that is, we sisters did, one thousand of our savings, and raised the other thousand on my mother's pittance—she, as you know, had just two thousand pounds left her by my father. Then Mary got ill and lost her situation, and had to come home and be nursed. It was too much for mother; she broke down suddenly, and I had to give up my place and come to look after both. But Mary didn't get better, she died; all this brought us very down, as you see. The others have done what they could, that is, the girls, I mean, but there is no such thief in the house as sickness; and all this, Mr.

Rout, all this for the poor vanity of having a grand gentleman in the family."

For a moment Nelly had lost sight of her visitor's announcement—her present troubles and sense of injury had perhaps a little deadened apprehension of the future. Rout brought her back.

"To whom did you pay the money?" he asked, "and did you, or who did, get up the bill?"

"I do not know what you mean by getting up the bill," she answered querulously. "It was the money-lender did that, I suppose; but we paid the money, two thousand pounds—blood-money, I call it—into Geoffrey's hands."

"Did you get an acknowledgment?"

"No; he said the cheque was receipt enough." And then the truth burst on her. "I see!" she cried. "I understand what you mean; he, Geoffrey, took the money for his own use and they're coming down on mother again."

Mr. Rout bowed his head.

"I fear it," he said.

“It does not matter,” she cried fiercely. “She will be beyond their reach, but thank the good God—” and she clasped her hands together in a very ecstasy of vengeance—“thank the good God *he* will not.” Then turning to the startled attorney she said, speaking stoically but determinedly, “Mr. Rout, the law shall take its course.”

“The two thousand left by your father,” he asked, “was in settlement on your mother first, and then on you, his four daughters?”

“Yes; we joined together to raise the thousand; they will get *nothing*.”

Then Mr. Rout told her of Elsie’s letter. The name was strange to her. He saw that, and he did not enlighten her to the extent of his own knowledge.

“An eccentric woman,” he explained; “a professional reciter, probably some engagement, he could not tell.”

She was not curious, only loathing; a desire for retribution possessed her at the moment.

“We were as dust beneath his feet,” she cried, bitterness and rage in her heart. “We

were not even dust to her when he was present. I think, sir, had he in his state and grandeur bid her come and be his menial, she would have gone, and hid from every one that she was his mother. Do you know, sir, she only once saw him in his fine regimentals, and that was not here? He never came here with his lacquey's livery on him; he came like Nicodemus, at night, in what he called his 'mufti.' She thought it royal purple because it clad him, the unnatural dastard. We all went with her—it was in London, in Hyde Park, and he rode past the Queen's carriage on his prancing horse, with his naked sabre in his hand. Oh, how brave he looked! I heard some one say he was the handsomest, and the gallantest, and the noblest of them all. He saw us, but he made no sign, so we ate our sandwiches, and sucked our oranges, and drank our ginger-beer, like the low plebeians we were, thinking it, perhaps, a rather questionable honour to have such a very magnificent relation. We didn't know he had left the army; we hadn't much time for newspaper reading, for you see we had

our bread to win, and when he wrote from Africa, and sent her a lion skin, she thought he had gone to fight the Hottentots, as she called them, and night and morning she wearied Heaven" — her voice grew softer here—" 'to deliver her darling from the jaws of the lion and from the sword of the deceitful and bloody man.' He had told her to speak very little to the neighbours about him. 'The Queen mightn't like,' he said, 'to hear his father was a tradesman, and if it got about it would prevent him making a grand marriage.' So she kept pretty quiet, poor woman, for his word was God's law to her. But before daybreak she will stand in the courts of Heaven, and if she can feel shame there, it will not be for the honest trader who called her wife, but for the despicable thing *she* called son."

There was something grand about the poverty-battered woman, something that told of intellectual power obscured by the sordid exigencies of a dreary life, of a keen sense of moral obligations, if not of a higher law. It was this something, with which was welded a

pitiful protecting love for the weak, gentle mother, that roused her passionate invective against the cruelty and injury from the hands of an "own familiar friend." So she glanced aside from Elsie Eber's name, for what were Geoffrey Tyler's friends to her?

Abram Rout, accustomed as he was to anguished cries of human souls in straits, shrank within himself at the fierce denunciation of this indigent daughter of toil, and the iniquity of the unprincipled son, which from a business point of view had seemed to him but genteel sharpening, took a deeper dye—the dye of sacrilege. It was not exactly pity he felt for the feeble existence passing through the dread valley. To die was in the ordinary course of things, and well for her, he said to himself; but it was the better, tenderer nature within that had been stirred by a weak woman's bitter revolt against wrong and cruelty. He determined that not only should the law take its course, but that he would himself make it as hot as he could for the unnatural miscreant. Mr. Rout's heart was hot within him, and he used words not

the current coin of the dignified firm of Raymont and Co.

After a minute's pause, he said quietly:

"Then you agree with me that Major Tyler must be left to meet this demand unassisted?"

"Yes; as I said before, let the law take its course. *She* will be safe."

He rose to leave.

"I am at Oxminster for a day or two; if you want anything, telegraph," and he wrote his address on a card, which she received with a grateful acknowledgment.

"We are not without friends here," she said, "but as you were an old acquaintance of my father, perhaps you would, if it should be convenient, not object to pay *her* the last mark of respect?"

This Mr. Rout promised to do, adding some everyday phrases of condolence, for the language of sympathy was an unknown tongue to him, and he could only repeat, like a parrot, the words of others; but his voice was kind, and the much-burdened woman thanked him from her heart.

The hot weary day at last wore on to evening, but still the sick woman slept.

Nelly had written the daily letters to her absent sisters, had spoken to one or two kindly inquirers through the half-opened window—one of whom carried the letters to the post for her—had made herself a cup of tea, and before she sat down to rest and think had paid some little attention to her attire. Then the doctor came in for a minute, promising to call later. As she let him out the bell of the sick room faintly tinkled. She called him back, and he followed her to his patient's side. The wasted hand was on the hand-bell, as if it had lacked strength to lift itself back to the bed, and the head had sunk on the pillow.

“Only a few minutes now,” he whispered to Nelly as he laid his fingers on the fluttering pulse.

“Nelly,” said the dying woman, “I have had a sound sleep; I will be stronger when he comes, but I want to say a word to you. I’m so sleepy I can hardly keep awake.” Her words were scarcely audible. “You and

John Parks must make it up between you when I am gone; he is a good man and he loves you. It won't matter so much, you see, because you will change your name, and as my name will only be on a tomb-stone it can't hurt Geoffrey." She spoke with difficulty, as if she could not express what she wished to say.

Nelly made no answer. She held wine to the white lips and then kissed the clammy brow.

The doctor, who knew the best part and guessed more of the story coming to an end now, whispered, "Poor woman, the master passion to the last."

"She has fallen asleep again," said Nelly, after a few minutes' silent watching. "I think she was dreaming; John Parks has been married ten years."

He looked pitifully at her. "Too late," he thought, "ten years too late."

They stood still yet another minute and then Nelly moved to the window and looked out. She turned away with a sigh. The doctor beckoned to her; she obeyed, stepping softly.

“Nothing will hurt her now,” he said; “it is all over.”

Nelly was schooled to suffering; only a short, quick gasp, and she stood still. It did not need to close the dead eyes, or to compose the hands. She had passed away in her broken slumber, with her palms joined in the attitude of prayer.

Two hours passed. A neighbour helped Nelly to perform the necessary offices for the poor clay. It lay now covered with a white sheet, sprigs of rosemary and rue strewed here and there.

There was nothing more to do, and promising to return later in the night, the assistant left. Nelly was not afraid of the dead; she was glad to be left alone. She sat down in the sitting-room and gave way to bitter weeping—how long she sat she did not know. She was called to outer life by a knock at the door. As she rose to open it the town hall clock struck nine.

“I was afraid you had all gone to bed,” said the newcomer, as he followed her to the sitting-room. “Is she asleep?”

Perhaps I had better come in the morning."

"I think not," was the curt answer, "but you can go up now," and she lighted a candle which she placed in his hands.

They were brother and sister, but for long years no greeting had passed between the twain.

He went. She listened to his step, slow and hushed, mounting the narrow stairs. She heard him open the door of the death-chamber, and her eyes glittered. A minute later and he stood before her again, ghastly white and trembling. Not a word could escape his ashy lips.

Perfectly calm, she took the candle, which was falling from his clutch, and set it on the table. Then she drew back the door to its limit, and pointed to it. He opened his lips to speak in vain. He looked into her face as if for mercy. What he saw there made his craven eyes quail, and without even a whisper of remonstrance, only with a moan, as if of pity for himself more than of grief for her, he hrunk away.

CHAPTER VII.

“ The independent commoner
Shall be the man for a’ that.”

“ But och mankind are unco’ weak, and little to be trusted,
If self the wavering balance shake, it’s rarely right adjusted.”

TOWARDS the evening of this eventful day the little town of Oxminster was in a state of active fermentation. The blue posters, with which the sharp London bill-stickers had covered every hoarding not already monopolized by the enemy, had spread the news of the pending contest to the very confines of the borough. Delivery carts bore on their flanks, with as yet impartial patronage, the rival colours, inspiring blue and stimulating yellow. The harlequin combination was everywhere, on trunks of trees, genteel gate pillars, lamp posts, and even the marble pedestal of Sir Janitor’s latest gift, the drinking fountain. Two opposing files of sandwich-men traversed the streets and suburbs, and handbills of the con-

tending colours were distributed with emulating lavishness by keen-eyed girls and nimble-footed boys. The energy Mr. Rout brought to bear in overtaking the enemy, supplanting and superseding, soon nullified the advantage of his adversary's stolen march, and they started fair. These preparations for the coming contest in active operation, Mr. Rout accompanied his noble client, Lord Le Pole, on a preliminary canvass. It was nearing six o'clock when, as an initiatory experiment, they entered the office of the *Weekly Sun*.

"The enemy's stronghold," said Lord Le Pole in surprise.

"Yes, 'the bull by the horns,' you know," was Mr. Rout's answer.

But the enemy had been before them. On the threshold of the door they encountered Mr. Rawson, conspicuous with a yellow rose in his button-hole. Mr. Rout greeted the young man cordially, and with much deference introduced the rivals. Lord Le Pole bowed stiffly, hesitated a moment, and then, as if ashamed of some inward monition, took Ned's proffered hand, saying, "I had almost for-

gotten we had met before. We were at Christ Church together, I think?"

"Yes," replied Ned with just a little *hauteur*, chilled by his opponent's unresponsive, if not repellent, manner; "and I fancy, from what I remember of your speech at the Union on disestablishment, that though our colours are antagonistic to-day, ours will be a difficult battle to fight; we are likely to tell the people the same story."

With a slightly affected manner Lord Le Pole brought a sprig of forget-me-nots fastened to his waistcoat more forward, and said with a decided drawl:

"Ah—h, I try to go with the times, but I fear I am slow. *We* have so much to forget, you see."

"To teach the people to forget, you mean," was the sharp answer.

"That is not a safe lesson to teach till they have been given something better to remember. Sir Janitor, I fear, is like all master-minds, in advance of his age."

There was slight but not intentional offensive sarcasm in this speech, the worthy knight

in question having a master-mind in but one particular, the aptitude of making money.

An angry flush came to Ned's cheeks. "I am my own conscience-keeper," he said, "but I've no doubt that between us we'll achieve the golden mean."

"Ah, that I must leave to you. I regret that we are rivals;" and very slightly raising his hat the young lord followed Mr. Rout, who had impatiently moved on, into the inner office.

Ned joined his agent, Mr. Patch, outside the door, and swung down the street, twirling his stick in the air, his ears tingling with the significant tone more than the words of his opponent, and his heart turning within him at what he felt to be the *de haut en bas* air of a conscious superior.

"I'll run him close," he said to himself, uttering in strange coincidence the same words his opponent had used on the previous day.

But the stimulus to this sudden rivalry of these two men differed widely in its source. Ned had been ready to fight the battle

amicably, so far as it was practicable. He was prepared to admire his adversary, and to give him credit for honesty of motive, but he had found him, so he thought, supercilious, haughty and contemptuous, and he would, he was determined on that, do his best to throw him, even to modifying his own independent *rôle*: but he little guessed that on one side, at any rate, the contest would owe its bitterness not to difference in political creed, or even the stake at issue, but to his supposed favour at the hands of his gay little friend Judy. But could Sir Janitor have peeped into the heart of the conservative candidate, he would have found his jibbing—so he termed him—relative somewhat easier in hand.

Ah, how often a little knowledge of that subtle undercurrent, motive, would change the course of events—here whetting the sword to keener conflict, there turning it aside for ever.

Mr. Rout, it seemed to Lord Le Pole, was received with extraordinary deference within that sacred sanctum, the editorial den. With a good deal of circumlocution Mr. Posser

acquainted his lordship with the fact that, being pledged to "irreconcilable opposition to any principles involving the conservation of existing things," he had promised his personal vote to the great liberal, Sir Janitor Tomlinson's nephew.

"Is he prepared to go as far as his uncle?" said Mr. Rout.

"In essentials, yes."

"And these are?" asked Lord Le Pole.

"Comprised in one phrase," was the reply, "*en avant*."

"In leaps and bounds. Well," and the young noble's face wore a smile of security, "Mr.—ah—Mr.—"

"Posser," said Mr. Rout.

"Mr. Posser, I sincerely trust the best man will win; but, you know, the race is not always to the swift."

"No, my lord," replied Mr. Posser, bowing with a very undemocratic servility, or perhaps, to be more accurate, with extreme democratic servility, "no, my lord, nor is the battle always to the strong."

The canvassers proceeded upstairs to the

private office of the publisher and general printer of the town, Mr. Curte, but with no better success. He, too, was pledged to the enemy. Mr. Curte's politics were those of many a better man—they were evolved from one particular point of view—personal interest. Liberalism, Radicalism, Democracy, Communism, mark the ascending scale; all meant agitation, movement, speculation, general upheaval in fact, and so pamphleteering, thirst of news, journalistic enterprise, accession to the ignoble army of irresponsible scribblers, and therefore grist to his mill, which, unlike that of the proverb, did not grind slow.

Mr. Curte believed himself to be a typical John Bull, blunt in speech and honest in aim, an honesty which made integrity in detail unnecessary. His palliative for any flagrant lapses in the rule of *meum* and *teum* was always the one word "business," a free rendering of the ethics of commerce. He knew a little about the personal affairs of the Earl of Albany, and that money was tight in that quarter. The place was a growing place, it

needed money ; therefore it was for the public benefit that the man with the most money got in. His men, however, were at liberty, so he assured his suitors, to vote as their principles prompted them. "Liberty and Equality" was his motto—his aim the welfare of the people only. With this flourish of trumpets he ushered his visitors into the compositors' room, and with a specious show of magnanimity withdrew.

Here they were more successful. The foreman, who seemed to know Mr. Rout, spoke for the rest. They were not pledged, he said, neither did they wish to pledge themselves to either candidate until the day of election. They wanted to hear what both sides had to say for themselves in public, and to turn the matter over in their minds and so understand things better. For his part, so far as he could see at present, he had nothing to find fault with in the politics of the late Sir Oscar Pierce, and he had been a conservative, he believed. Whatever he was, it seemed to him he had been the true benefactor of their town, for he had given the people work, which was

independent bread. Charities were very well in their way, but they were own cousins to workhouses. So the man who was prepared to do the most for the industries of the place was most sure to be the man for him and his mates.

Lord Le Pole thanked the speaker with frank warmth for his "manly speech," and with great tact, forbearing any expression of his own creed at present, raised his hat slightly in courteous adieu all round.

"I will show my colours when the day comes," he said. "I flatter myself you will rally under them."

"You hold us safe, sir," whispered the foreman in Mr. Rout's ear as he followed his client out.

"Certainly; I have told Curte so."

"Well, Bill," said a compositor to his mate, both hard at work in big type for the enemy, "there's summat, let folks say as they like about a nob, that takes the shine out of a commoner. That young Rawson is a hearty chap enough, a real gent too, but somehow I didn't just feel like shaking hands with the t'other, and I did with him."

“Ben, man,” replied his mate, “the nob’s the kind o’ chap a fellow could follow if he was a soldier like. I could black his’ns boots, I could, an’ it wouldn’t seem so much out of the ordinary ways of things, *if he was put to it*, for t’other to black mine.”

“What do you think of it all, Sandy?” asked the man, addressed as Ben, of a middle-aged Scotchman, at the moment intent on fastening his filled-in galley in its form.

“Jist what any ither sensible body wad think,” was the slow answer. “There’s degrees in everything, baith under an’ ayont the sun, an’ it’s jist rank presumption on any one’s part to even one agin the other. Eh, it wad be queer reading wantin’ the capitals. But it’s a question o’ adjustment, for there wad be nae use for capitals ava if there was nae sma’ type; it’s to serve *that* they’re set apart, no’ *that* to serve them. It’s a’ havers this cry o’ equality; it’s just the sma’ type cravin’ to be capitals themselves. What did Sir Janitor, the great liberal as he sets oot to be, what did he let himself be sirred for? Eh, lads, he’s nae mair nor a muckle shaum.”

“Ye’ll be for the lord then,” said Bill.

“I’m no’ gaun to say wha I’m for till I hear *what* they’re for. What they say in public they maun hang tae; when they’re on the road it’s a’ praisin’ and flaitherin’. We hae lost a gude man i’ Sir Oscar Pierce. He’s a cantie lad tho’, that young Rawson.”

Mr. Rout said to himself at the close of his afternoon canvass that his client’s success was doubtful beyond his own fears. Money, too, was tight, but on the enemy’s side it was easy—so easy that he determined to observe extra caution in his own outlay, that should he lose he might have something more than a chance of recovering the day on petition. Unexpectedly to himself, judging from Mr. Raymond’s initiatory account of his client, he had found the latter not only more amenable on the score of creed than he had anticipated, but much more eager for success; indeed it seemed to his acute probing instinct that, apart from every other consideration, his client was actuated by a personal rivalry, the outcome, he felt convinced, of some powerful

incentive in the background. This he would be on the watch to discover.

After dinner, which he had taken in the commercial room, his noble client in his private quarters, he lit a cigar and strolled forth to reconnoitre the field of the approaching contest. At the door of the hotel a porter handed him a note which was marked "private" inside. It was from Sir Janitor Tomlinson.

It was not usual for Mr. Rout to destroy such documents. The future to him had always unlimited possibilities. But in this instance he immediately after reading it tore the note into shreds. He then sauntered down the street a few yards, turned back lazily, and re-entered the hotel.

"The evening is so tempting," he said to the landlord, who happened to be crossing the hall, "I think I shall take a ride. Have you a quiet old roadster?"

This, mine host assured him, he had.

So in the space of a very few minutes Mr. Rout was trotting leisurely towards the high-road to London, in the opposite direction to

Sir Janitor's magnificent mansion. When fairly out of observation of the town, he made a sharp *détour*, and after a half-hour's brisk trot pulled up at the knight's door.

"Sir Janitor expects me; I come on business," he said to the servant in answer to that individual's request for his name, who a little dubiously led the way to his master's study.

Sir Janitor was at his favourite occupation, totting up columns in a ledger, an occupation which satisfactory results had made pleasant, but no longer necessary. Habit, however, had made it indispensable to his enjoyment; it was now, in fact, his recreation.

"Mr. Rout, sir," said the city knight with burlesqued dignity and *hauteur*, mechanically placing his pen at the back of his ear as he jerked out his arms to bring down his coat-sleeves, an old office habit, and threw himself back in his chair, "Mr. Rout, sir, be seated," and he pointed to a chair conveniently close, into which his visitor subsided.

"I regret, sir," continued the knight, puffing with importance, "that I was late in securing your services for my nephew, and I

may add I was surprised. I hardly expected to find the proprietor of the *Sun* advancing tory interests."

"Pardon me, Sir Janitor," was the suave answer, "my client repudiates effete toryism; but allow me to say I regret, and very deeply, too, that my partner, Mr. Raymont, should have pledged the firm to Lord Le Pole without first consulting me. The fact is the earl is one of his oldest clients, and he could not refuse to do his best for his son. I assure you we—that is, the firm—had a very earnest consultation on the possibility of getting out of the engagement, but Mr. Raymont said that he was sure you would have no confidence in us from a business point of view if we ratted, for he doesn't think our client has a ghost of a chance. He said you were too keen-sighted and too honourable to trust any one who swerved from straight business lines. We were the more bound to our noble client"—Sir Janitor grew red and puffed—"because, you see"—here Mr. Rout's voice fell to a whisper—"there is not too much money, and I need hardly say"—his voice rose to its normal key

—"that Raymont, Rout and Rally are not merely mercenary agents."

Sir Janitor bowed graciously, holding tightly by the arms of his chair. The obeisance so performed was rather a tax on the worthy knight's respiratory organs, which were apt, under sudden pressure, to produce symptoms of apoplexy. On this occasion his very impressive affability brought his red "dab" chin almost into contact with his aldermanic development, and sent up his little calfless legs in a balancing protest.

Taking a moment for panting, he recovered, and then, as if about some congenial and familiar action, he opened a secret drawer, drew out a roll of bank-notes, and slowly, temptingly spread them before his visitor.

"Ten hundred," he said; "that is right, just one thousand."

He then placed a small letter-weight on the appetizing heap, and again turned to his companion.

"I have the highest opinion of your firm," he said, "but it was my knowledge of *your* special qualifications that determined me to

offer it this job. It couldn't avail itself of my offer, and there, in a business sense, the matter ends. But, sir, you and I have had a good many little transactions together, which, I think, were *mutually* satisfactory."

Mr. Rout bowed in grave assent.

"My agent, Mr. Davis, writes me that you wish the Tyler bill, held by—by *us*, reduced when you are prepared to take it up."

Mr. Rout again bowed, keeping his eyes, which he felt might betray him, so keen and restless they felt, firmly fixed on the point of his boot.

"Now, sir, have you a personal interest in this bill? We know each other, so you need have no reservation."

"No, Sir Janitor, none. Indeed, as things connected with this bill have turned out, I am not now prepared to take it up at all. Mrs. Tiler, the acceptor, is dead. Major Tyler, the drawer, is at this present moment in Casterham. I'm afraid it will prove a bad debt."

"The Egbert till is full enough," replied the knight, forgetting his *rôle* of dignity for

the present, and winking as he put his little pudgy forefinger along the side of his nose.

"Many a slip," said Mr. Rout with an upward glance.

"Ah, say so, 'bliged to you. 'A wink's as good as a nod,' you know, &c."

Sir Janitor had made a serious lapse to primeval days. Mr. Rout smiled with infirmatory significance.

"Ah, Rout, Rout, you're a sly dog." This was accompanied by a sharp dig in the ribs, which transformed the smile into an apprehending laugh.

"Well, never mind, we'll tell him. No good a roof without a *till*. Ha, ha, ha! Not bad, is it?"

Mr. Rout said it was better than "not bad," it was splendid; "true wit, in fact."

"But now to business," resumed the knight, casting a side look at the weighted pile by his side. "I have said, Rout, that you and I know each other. We have more than once"—and the little man dove-tailed his fingers—"you know. Well, of course you are too old a bird to be caught by chaff; golden

grain for such as you, and me, too. *Every man has his price.* You believe that ? ”

“ I know it.”

“ That’s sensible. Now we understand each other. I always have my price, always have had, or shouldn’t be here to-day. Money, sir, money is the only *real* power in the world, *in proper hands*. Now we all have our weaknesses—best infirmity of noble minds, you know—love of fame, &c. Mine is to see my sister’s son—my nephew, sir—the member for Oxminster. The place owes it to me, sir. Two hundred thousand pounds hard cash I have laid out on the moral elevation of the people, and I think I deserve the return I seek. Ned is a clever lad. Takes after me, they say, but he is inclined to jib. He has some love affair, I hear—a Miss Judy Aylmere—not a penny, of course, but a divinity, &c., some cousin, by the way, to this old Miss Egbert that scoundrelly major is after. There is a rumour, too, that she will have the Egbert estates some day, but I don’t mind vain jabber. I know about the family in a business way, and the present squire can

leave the property as he likes. He is in his *second prime* too, hale and hearty, not touched eighty; good for matrimony yet. The youngest Miss Egbert, too, who is only forty-five, may marry. 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast,' &c. Ned must have a career, and a poor wife would drag him down. I'll play him soft, though. Young things must be mouthed easy, and I'll let him think he may win her some day. So now, Rout, you see, my *carte de pays* is ready for war," and he nearly choked.

Mr. Rout again nodded with significance; but had Sir Janitor not been so absorbed in himself, he must have noticed a sudden accession of interest in his auditor at the mention of Miss Judy Aylmere's name.

"They are idle rumours, Sir Janitor," he said with the air of a person secretly informed. "I happen to know that my noble client"—the knight relapsed into incipient apoplexy—"has intentions in that quarter."

Sir Janitor had again seized the arms of his chair, and was panting himself into speaking tune:

"Then, by ——, sir," he roared, "Ned shall have her, and Oxminster too, or I'm a red herring—a—&c. Albany sir! a rotten earldom, not a penny of ready cash, as you know; why, his paper is everywhere. Oh, yes, the property's entailed, I know that, but not all, and it's heavily mortgaged for life. Only yesterday we discounted two bills for him. Money, sir, money's the only aristocracy, and I'm blessed if my money shan't floor this nob."

Mr. Rout wisely held his peace; the wind was blowing as he wished it.

Sir Janitor gradually puffed into quietude.

"To return to our muttons, &c.," he said in a conciliatory tone. "We're old pals, Rout." He held out his hand, which his visitor took, returning the reassuring squeeze. "Done some good turns together. Capital property that *Sun*," and he laughed. "Name your price, and here's a thousand over." He touched the heap at his side. "You know what's what, no need to waste words; there it is for the lifting," and he pushed the pile towards the conservative candidate's

agent. "Patch will settle the rest *on the square.*"

There was a silence of at least a minute.

Mr. Rout had become very white ; a struggle, not very deadly, was trying his strength, but the only fear he was thus inwardly combating was the fear of *being found out*. Dare he close on the thousand ? Le Pole had not a chance. Well, if he did close, he would not waste the young fellow's money ; no corruption, no bribery. Le Pole was high-minded. His fingers relaxed ; and his hand insensibly wore towards the pile with a wary, spider-like movement. At last he spoke :

"I should like it in gold, Sir Janitor," he said.

That was all.

The gold was heavy in his breast-pocket as he trotted sharply back to his inn ; but if imponderable forces could have had material influence, his heart would have outweighed it.



CHAPTER VIII.

“An habitation, giddy and unsure,
Hath he that buildeth on the vulgar heart.”

YOUNG Rawson's life had hitherto been a singularly homeless life.

His father, an old Indian general, had severed a not very creditable career in an out-of-the-way little town in Brittany in hiding from his creditors, leaving his widow and only child “respectably,” as he termed it, provided for by the Indian Fund.

He had married, late in life, the elderly sister of Sir Janitor Tomlinson, to whom her brother had given a very considerable dower. She had kept Sir Janitor's house ably, and to his satisfaction, and being a clever, apt woman had used such opportunities as had come within her reach to improve her extremely rudimentary education.

Like her brother, she was hard of brain,

though quick and retentive, and valued knowledge simply for the social advantages it carried with it. She was of a retiring disposition, but of rather a showy exterior. A belle in her very young days, with no lack of admirers.

But as her brother gradually rose above the state of life into which he had been born, a state into which even a humbler cottage home had not entered, she vowed to herself to rise with him. This was not difficult to achieve.

His sister was Janitor Tomlinson's only link to his lowly past, and to elevate her, was to leave no compromising evidence of his origin. There were twenty years between the brother and sister.

Their father had dropped off the scene, how, they hardly knew; had gone on the tramp and been lost, his widow said. She, however, died peacefully on her pallet bed in her poor one-room lodging.

Janitor was then twenty-five and battling with fortune in great London. He did not, till nearly a year had elapsed, hear of his mother's death. He was too busy with that

then dubious contest to trouble much about responsibilities.

When the news did reach him, inadvertently, he set off for his native place with a dim perception of what was required of him in the eyes of humanity, to provide for the maintenance and partial education of his sister, a mere child of five years.

He then returned to his energetic, toiling, grasping life, almost forgetting that in his little despised birthplace he had such a tangible link to another life. Money-making and money-saving were his only instincts. No thought of matrimony for himself ever crossed his thoughts. To have considered the possibility of such a thing would have taken time, and time to Janitor meant money.

At sixty he had acquired very considerable wealth, and then some latent instinct of a home-feeling, roused him to buy land in his native town and rear a mansion. This done, he took his sister as his housekeeper.

She did not disgrace his rising position. She had pursued the occupation of a lace-worker, so eking out her brother's allowance.

She had lived greatly to herself, and had read everything on which she could lay her hands.

As his wealth expanded, his pride kept pace with it, an ignoble pride, which yet found what outside charity would term "noble expression," in which way Oxminster benefited, as we have shown.

To establish a social position in the neighbourhood he gave heavy entertainments, at which his sister presided with a certain dignity and simplicity, that won the respect of those who sneered at the "presumptuous little knight."

When quite forty-five she met General Rawson at Sir Oscar Pierce's house, and, with her brother's approval, married him.

It had been understood that she should still remain mistress of the knight's establishment. "My sister, Mrs. General Rawson," was the card he had counted on playing; but this arrangement was brought to a speedy termination.

Mrs. Rawson found it impossible to serve two masters, and cleaving to the one given

her by the law, left—deserted, he said—the one she had voluntarily served so well.

After a year or two of quietly borne ill-usage and indignity, the general considerably relieved her by making her his widow. She did not enjoy her regained freedom long, but died without having become reconciled to her brother, leaving her little son perfectly homeless.

Sir Janitor, after he had placed the boy at school, almost forgot his existence. The occasions on which that fact was brought to his memory were not conducive to the generation of the natural affection his heart lacked. These were the terms when the school-bills became due, and he was called upon to supplement the slender provision of the Indian Fund, and the times, not unfrequently, when his domestic machinery got out of gear. At such junctures his heart was sore within him, and the iniquities of the deceased general and the ingratitude of his sister were vicariously embodied in their son.

But as the years crept on the El Dorado of his youthful vision seemed to his dimmed per-

ceptions, in all that could fill the insatiable craving of a sordid ambition, but as a *Fata Morgana*. The gold he had won was no longer gold to him, if it failed to procure him the outside consideration his pride demanded. *This* his benefactions to his native town obtained for him in a degree, but inasmuch as he had looked for his own again his reward was not that full measure, pressed down and running over, which, poured into the breast, fills the heart. It mortified him to think that his lavish charities should be gauged by their spirit and not by their money value, and be regarded not as monuments of philanthropy, but of vain glory. And any pride his native town might have in the name of Tomlinson, as now represented in the guild of knighthood, was reflected on the shoeless Arab, to whom by dubious right it had appertained. It was proud of the thrift and courage that had achieved so much. Sir Janitor Tomlinson only of that much.

So it fell out that little Edward Rawson grew to manhood, knowing nothing of domestic affection or human love of any degree.

For his holidays he was boarded out, either at a farmhouse or a needy parsonage. He had not even the chance of forming school friendships, as the caprice of his guardian seldom allowed of his remaining beyond a year at a time at any school. Once, and only once, he had spent a vacation in a companion's family, and what he saw on that occasion of domestic life made an impression destined to influence in the future his own relations in that direction. There the women of the family were treated as pretty dolls, social puppets, amusing and loving pets, to be cared for, admired, played with, and humoured, but in no degree approached from a standpoint of "equality." The creed of that house was male supremacy, in a very broad rendering of the Turkish doctrine of female inferiority. And as if to show to what base uses we *may* return, there was neither protest in this circle nor crying out of any spirit in bondage. It all seemed so natural. Ned supposed it was natural, and that woman was not even "lesser man." So, with respect to women, Sir Janitor did not find in his

nephew an uncongenial temperament when, awake to the fact that the "beggar's brat," as in his rage at the mendacious general he had called his son, was one likely to bring the honour to his house he himself had so signally failed in bringing, he opened to the lad the princely gates of Janitor Hall. There the best Ned heard of the one woman in whom at that time he felt even a tepid interest, his mother, was that she had been an admirable housekeeper, possessed of a handsome person, and with a womanly virtue of subserviency which had leant to frailty's side, "but in all," the knight said, a little softened by Ned's good looks and modesty, "a very rare specimen of what a woman should be."

From this time, but with no lavish hand, Sir Janitor undertook to give his nephew a career, and as an initiative placed him at Oxford, where, as has been seen, he made his mark. But on all occasions, to the young man himself, and to those to whom the subject might be relevant, Sir Janitor was assiduous in proclaiming that, beyond a fair start in life, he was to look for absolutely

nothing from his wealthy relative. He had "other claims," he said ambiguously, and he was a "just man." So it came to be known that there was no question of eventual heirship between the rich old knight and his clever, handsome nephew; yet so variously do facts operate on different intelligences, this certainty, while with some it deprived Ned of a certain prestige, with others it appealed to a chivalric feeling and secured him friendly countenance and sympathy. Of these latter not a few were among the lowly electors of Oxminster. To these the knight was an "unnatural old curmudgeon," and his charities only "bribes to Heaven."

It was in the last year of his scholastic probation, the year before he was to enter on his university career, that Ned had spent that memorable vacation at his school-fellow Jack Cleveland's home. There he met Judy Aylmere, then a girl of thirteen, he being five years the elder. It was the first year of Mrs. Aylmere's widowhood. She had just moved to her new home at Casterham, and was dejected and averse to seeing strangers, but

at the same time anxious to give her child such recreation as was consistent with their deep mourning. An invitation to pass a fortnight with the Clevelands offered, and was accepted by Mrs. Aylmere for her daughter.

The Clevelands were old friends of the Egberts; their place was near Casterham. A very merry friendship had been struck up between the lively young people, a friendship which was renewed from time to time on the occasion of sundry short visits. Ned was in the habit of paying the Clevelands. Mrs. Aylmere, always on the *qui vive* for possible eligibles for Judy, had taken considerable pains to ascertain all particulars respecting the handsome Ned Rawson. She prided herself upon keen insight into intentions and foresight of likely actions, and knowing something of the vanity and meanness of Sir Janitor she became convinced that his intentions were to leave the bulk of his great wealth to some charity which would give his name place among the Howards and Peabodys of modern history. Ned was clearly not an eligible. She was, however, too imaginary

by half, and by endeavouring to place a barrier of reserve between the young people she in fact was fanning what, on Judy's side at any rate, was but a nascent flame. She did not know, so blind is over diplomacy, that careless familiarity and commonplace intercourse seldom conduce to a *grande passion*, which must ever have some romantic halo over its surroundings, some mystery of doubt or fear in its commencement.

All these Ned's story, as told to Judy by her mother, supplied.

From that time, insensibly to herself, she felt a growing interest in all that concerned the young man, often urging on him the necessity of determining his future course of life. It seemed to her that he had noble aspirations, and yet not decision enough to make his choice of a career and keep to it. Very eloquent she would wax on the elevating principle of earnest work, would sketch out plans of great things to do, waving in advance, with all the enthusiasm of an ardent spirit, triumphal banners over her imaginary hero. At such times she would be brought to earth

with a dull thud, by a light jest or matter-of-fact observation from the very object of her inspiration ; then when she would pout, or mayhap drop a tear of mortification, Ned would laugh merrily, would kiss her hand perhaps, and say, "Little Judy, what do women know about these things?"

And so the little Judy, under the expanding influence of the specious major, set herself to learn something of "these things," rebelling against the monopoly of wisdom by the sterner sex. But the major only threw open to her inquiring spirit the bare outposts of knowledge, and perhaps no one would have been more surprised than himself could he have followed her eager steps into the wider realm beyond.

She was an omnivorous reader, and so had become possessed of much discursive, if not very definite, information. Now she planned a particular routine of study, by which she hoped to become able not only to understand, but discuss with intelligence the social and political problems of the day. In pursuance of this object she brought together from

various sources—Smith's library, for which she took an eight volume subscription, and friends' bookshelves—political historical works of ambitious calibre, social essays, and biographical studies. Over these she wasted the midnight oil, and though her intelligence was of too high an order, not in some degree to lay in stores of golden grain for thought to justify, yet, she owned it to herself, the task was dull with no encouraging word in her ear, or wise eyes to let in full light on her wondering vision. There was literally no one to ask. The squire's learning, she knew, was limited, and his opinions, such as he had received them, with some slight modern modifications, from his father. He would only tell her not to try her pretty teeth with nuts she would never have to crack. Sybella she found a little informing, but she keenly perceived that in matters of opinion Sybella was as narrow as her father. Mabella thought there were wise enough heads at the helm to guide the bark in her time—and after her, the deluge; and Dulsie, dear old Dulsie, cared for none of these things.

CHAPTER IX.

“For we sometimes gently wrangled,
Very gently, be it said,
Since our thoughts were disentangled
By no breaking of the thread.”

It was at this juncture of bewilderment that happy fate threw in Judy's way Elsie Eber, one of the most cultivated and original women of her day. Judy had been from the first insensibly drawn to the mysterious-looking and gifted girl; circumstances threw them much together, and Elsie reciprocating her young friend's growing liking, an intimacy was soon formed. It was not, however, for some time — not till Judy's return from her week's stay at Egbert Hall—that she summoned courage to ask of Elsie direction in her search after knowledge—the knowledge of things as they were. Especially did she ask for counsel how best to understand the points of view, from which, it seemed to her,

equal intellects arrived at such opposite conclusions.

Never had mistress an apter pupil, never pupil a more luminous teacher. Each day, as the contest at Oxminster dragged its long preliminary length, the friends would retire with books, pamphlets and newspapers to Elsie's pretty chamber at Seapinks, and, after an hour's steady reading of political biography, discuss knotty points of some social question, or, in higher flight, the intricate subject of England's position in balancing power. Each day, too, they followed the course of existing policy, both home and foreign, making themselves thoroughly acquainted with both sides of any very prominent topic, till often the pretty little boudoir-bedroom was transformed into a miniature parliament, the different articles of furniture and ornament doing duty for listening senators.

It soon became evident to Elsie, that docile as her pupil was, her keen intelligence was of too individual a character to accept opinions on a moulded form. Judy thought for herself. She had her own point of view, arguing

from that, with original force and subtle wit. And as her knowledge increased, fainter and fainter grew her reverence for names, which, in her nonage of ignorance, she had been used to utter with bated breath.

“Elsie,” she said one day with a pretty assumption of didactic sagacity, “Elsie, there are more quacks in politics than in medicine. Charlatanism, I suppose, pays.”

“Yes,” said Elsie with a sigh. “Pure patriotism is a losing game.”

“Elsie,” she cried in a rallying tone, “I fear, like that devious young gentleman who used to take a constitutional at peep of dawn, ‘melancholy has marked you for its own.’ Come out with me now and take a ‘sniff of the briny;’ to the winds with the abstruse questions of moralities that have no existence but in the brains of dreamers; away with the histories of old *unworthies* who are maybe standing beside us in this resurrectionizing rostrum with their heads under their arms in orthodox fashion—a sort of penance for going so far ahead in the flesh; the room’s full of them, Elsie. I’m sure of it, I’m so witchy to-

day. Shall I lay them? You'll be the *belle*; here's a blue book, the very thing for the blue devils, and this lucifer," she held up a match, "will do for a candle. Proceed!"

"Judy, you are beside yourself," said Elsie, laughing at the young girl's *abandon* of merriment. "You had better exhaust yourself before you come out. Here is Mr. Rawson's speech of yesterday, it will quiet you, and you can finish with Lord Le Pole's; they're both in the *Electric*."

"Read them both in bed this morning," said Judy, with not a little accession of conscious colouring in her cheeks. "They're a pair of duffers."

"Judy!"

"A vulgar pinch of snuff clears the brain, my dear. I'm better already, and I deliberately repeat that Rawson and Le Pole are duffers."

"Order," cried Elsie.

Judy took the floor with a spring, her piquant face aglow with defiant mischief, and her eyes sparkling with a spirit of arch raillery.

“Mr. Speaker”—she looked towards a toy automaton on the mantel-piece—“I am not out of order, I am too sadly in order. When two honourable members go at each other hammer and tongs, for no other purpose but to prove themselves the best man——”

“Judy, dear, remember Sir Boyle Roche.”

“If the learned member for Fustianshire knows what I mean he needn’t mind what I say,” retorted Judy.

“Then he won’t,” laughed Elsie.

“Each to prove himself the best man,” she went on, “and rig themselves out in the cast-off garments—be these blue or buff—of an effete aristocracy, what, Mr. Speaker, are they but duffers? The people, sir, want definiteness in principles and in action. Each section of the great human community has its own special interest at stake, and that, too, is its Alpha and Omega of politics. Topsy-Turvey with its 20,000 electors wants a free tap as well as a free breakfast-table. Give them a man who ‘hops’ with them and the Queen may present Gibraltar as a Christmas-box to her trusty cousin, the

Czar of all the Russias, for aught it cares. It is the tendency of modern constituencies, the crime, sir, of most, to be venal. The learned member for Bathos," she indicated the whereabouts of a sitz-bath, "agrees with my honourable friend the member for Fustian-shire that patriotism is a losing game; but, Mr. Speaker, how can a game be 'losing' that is never played? Agitation is not patriotism, and nations are getting too mixed up to be individual. It is a very shaky world, Mr. Speaker. It is the fashion to say we must look for truth in poetry only, not in history. If that be so, then the poet's dream, 'the federation of the world,' draws near. Bosh, sir. Bosh! A conglomeration of impossibilities. I hold a cosmopolitan a traitor to humanity."

"Question," laughed Elsie.

"Sir, the question runs through my argument. But I deny that patriotism is a losing game; it is a virtue, and as 'virtue alone is happiness below,' so the poet sings, is not happiness worth playing for? No, sir, don't tell me that patriotism is off the boards. It

is its counterfeit, transcendentalism, hissed off by the irresponsible apostles of idiotic common sense."

The luncheon gong sounded. Judy came down from her Pegasus and seized her hat.

"I had no idea it was so late," she said. "I must be off; cousin Egbert is at the Lodge to-day. I don't want to be late for luncheon."

She bent down and kissed Elsie.

"Child," whispered the latter, detaining her hand, "you never said who you are wishing for at Oxminster, the lord or the commoner."

"That's just what I don't know myself," was the answer, given gravely, if not fretfully.

Elsie looked at her searchingly.

She tossed her head impatiently, a sure sign with Judy that she was at war with herself; then with an affectation of indifference she added lightly :

"By the time Oxminster has made up its mind I shall understand things better, but I should like them both to win."

"Judy, dear, you can tell me one thing; whose speeches do you like best?"

Judy knitted her brows, writhed her prisoned hand without trying to draw it from the firm retaining grasp, and at last, as in sheer desperation, said :

“ Just the one I read last,” and she was off.

A mischievous impulse brought her back. She put her head in at the door and cried :

“ Which do you ? ’

“ I think both’s best,” was the answer, given with laughing malice prepense.

Judy was very quiet at luncheon. She was preoccupied.

Lady Margaret Dredger and the Cricket had, on two occasions, since her memorable visit to Marlby Grange, driven over and spent the day at Egbert Lodge. The last time Lord Albany accompanied them ; he was very sanguine as to the success of his son.

“ Mr. Rout understands the people,” he said, “ and can pull the wires cleverly. He knows to a man those in my interest, and Sir Oscar was a very old friend of mine.”

The squire hinted that the liberal papers seemed equally sure of their man.

“ I never read a radical paper”—liberal

and radical were synonymous terms to the earl. "The *Standard* yesterday said Le Pole's policy is the natural corollary of that of the late member, and that at a great meeting in the town hall the show of hands was in his favour."

"The *Times*," said the squire, "had a very severe article on the indecent haste with which the *Weekly Sun*, a low democratic organ, the one paper of Oxminster, repudiates for the town the entire political catechism of Sir Oscar, 'a man,' said the article, 'who raised it from a rustic obscurity to a respectable position in trade, and endowed it with a political existence.'"

"Rout said he had influence with the local press," returned the earl, "so Le Pole assured me. Le Pole doesn't like him. He thinks him shifty."

"It is a first-class firm, is it not?" said the squire.

"Oh yes, undeniably, Mr. Raymont is my confidential business agent."

"Le Pole goes further than I had expected. I could not quite gather what he meant by his

definition of democracy. Rather a touchy subject to handle nowadays. I wonder he didn't steer clear of quick sands and keep well out to sea."

"Just my advice, Egbert, but in a letter I had this morning he says he has been tormented by what the Scotch call 'hecklers,' a set of dogged dunderheads primed with compromising questions; for when he gives as lucid, and to the point answer, as he can, some fellow, sharp and unscrupulous, jumps up and pulls his reply to pieces. But he goes further than I do. However, if he gets in he'll settle down. There are very few demagogues within the walls of St. Stephen."

"What does he say on democracy?" asked Judy modestly.

Much pleased, the earl addressed himself to her :

"He said that it did not necessarily mean any violent political change, that it was simply a government for and by the people, with no tendency to affect the monarchy or trench on the balancing influence of the hereditary house. He quoted the observation of a

member of that chamber—that if the lords threw themselves into aggressive opposition to the collective sense of the people, and so came into violent contact with democracy, it—the upper chamber—would probably meet democracy as Stephenson's 'cow did the locomotive.' He then went on to speak of American institutions, which seem to have bit him. A tour in the States would soon cure him."

"I read that bit," said Judy timidly. "He said that persons who elected by free choice a moderate intellect to represent them, were better off than those who had a leviathan intellect placed over them against their will, and this free choice the United States had."

"Well done, little Judy," cried the squire, "there's a future for you when women get the suffrage."

"Goodness forbid!" piously ejaculated the earl.

"I am not a strong-minded female," snapped Sybella, "and I would almost rather hear a woman swear than talk politics."

"Ah, Judy," said Dulsie obtusely, "it was that clever man the major who turned your

head. You've been reading books ever since he went away; I heard him tell you that you had a very uncommon mind."

"He told us all that," put in Sybella; "it was only the fools that believed it, though."

No one knew better than Judy how best to sooth irritated susceptibilities and to turn aside a *casus belli*, so now she turned to her rather spiteful cousin and said, smiling with a sweetness even she could never withstand:

"Oh no, Sybella darling, oh no, he only said I had a quick apprehension; and you know, for I have often heard you say so, that quick-witted people are very seldom clever. I was not a bit complimented, I can assure you, for I always think Tim so quick-witted. But I'll tell you what he did say"—just for a moment her bright eyes scintillated mischievously—"he said *you* had a master-mind."

With a look of almost innocent fatuity she met Sybella's suspicious gaze. Mabella, who always held her tongue when the major came on the tapis, now glancing aside from the tempting subject, shook her head at Judy, saying:

“It’s just the old story. ‘Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.’ You must practise more, child, and I’ll teach you to make wax flowers ; they’re coming in again.”

The earl, who had been amused at Judy’s fencing, came to the rescue. He said :

“Modern society demands that women should know most things. The Duke of Tancred says he owes his own marvellous success to a woman’s influence. But, Miss Aylmere,” he turned to Judy, smiling, “you must not attach too much importance to the enunciations from a hustings. It is wonderful the cooling-down power of St. Stephen’s.”

“Young Rawson,” said the squire as they all left the luncheon-table, “has made a great bid to the extremists. He began by declaring himself an independent liberal—radical, I suppose he means—and I see he is pledged against the Licensing Bill. Le Pole stops there, however. Up to that point it seems to me that his rivalry has been so keen that where his adversary has compelled him to go one mile, he has gone twain.”

“Never mind, Egbert, he will take his seat

to the right of the Speaker, and then he will be all right."

"Rawson will run him close, Albany."

"I think not," the earl spoke stiffly, and then added confidently, "Raymont says Rout keeps the expenses considerably under, and he couldn't do that if Mr. Rawson had a chance. You can't believe the radical press."



CHAPTER X.

“ Know not what you know, and see not what you see.”

“ A dog of parts.”

SINCE the day of the squire's confidences to his little friend on the turret of his old Hall, a great tenderness had crept into the intercourse between the twain. His spirit seemed to have entered into a certain rest, and outside things to trouble him less. A less ambitious steed than Gloriana had been brought from the Hall for Judy's use, and every morning, when the tide was at low ebb, she took her racy gallop on the splendid stretch of level sand. One morning, it was the day after the earl's visit, the tide being full in, she diverged from her usual route and bore off to a distant village, Preene by name, the squire's groom on the cob in her wake.

The locomotive arrangements at the Lodge consisted of, besides Judy's horse and the

squire's cob, a waggonette and a pair of sober bays, a small low phaeton and a pair of grey ponies. This last was looked upon as Mabella's special allotment. She usually drove it herself, unless Judy made a second, when she naturally, as it were, delivered up the reins to her. On the seat behind, the small Buttons—a great favourite with Judy—surveyed the passing scene with crossed arms contemptuously.

The last few days Mabella had taken to driving out before breakfast. This had not been an unusual practice of hers in earlier years, but Mabella had increased in girth and decreased in activity. She had become in fact, like Dulsie, not a little lazy. She was developing symptoms of gout, and her doctor had often urged her to earlier hours and more frequent exercise; so as she had been fretful and ailing the last fortnight, it did not appear strange that she should break in on her indulgent routine and rouse herself to try the restoring effects of the early morning air. She had gone through the ceremony of inviting her sisters to accompany her, but

Dulsie shuddered at the thought, and Sybella said her Turkish baths tried her strength enough. Judy proposed that they should "do" the sands in company, but Mabella declared that she got enough of the sea during the day, so it fell out that each morning she and her smart little greys took their matutinal alone.

It was a misty morning, and Judy indulged in a free gallop. The village towards which her face was set was a mere hamlet, distant some eight miles from Sandycot. There was a quaint old church on its border, very plainly Saxon in its form. Service was held here once every Sunday, there being no resident pastor, and not above thirty worshippers in all. When occasions called, baptisms, burials, and marriages were performed by the rector of the parish, whose fine old Norman church and modern rectory lay some six miles distant.

There was a farmhouse of humble pretensions on the outskirts of the few houses that formed the hamlet. It was the breakfast-hour, and but few stragglers were visible.

Judy rode leisurely past, the reins loose on her horse's neck. The groom had met an acquaintance and was lingering in the distance. She was virtually alone.

Suddenly she smelt a cigar, discriminating at once between it and the exhalation of common tobacco, and immediately following she saw a man issue from a side wicket. The figure seemed strangely familiar, but she could not discern the features. These were obscured by a broad slouch hat, from under which rose the fragrant wreaths of smoke. He evidently did not perceive her approach. Her horse was moving sluggishly, not in the centre of the road, but close beside the turfy ditch-shore overshadowed by sweeping elms. He crossed the road before her very eyes, opened a gate leading into a hay-field, and was shutting it behind him when the quick trot of the cob overtaking its convoy broke on his ear. He looked up, and Judy recognized, almost with a thrill of fear, Major Tyler. The unwitting jerk she gave her reins made her horse start. The major turned quickly round, and Judy saw that the

recognition was mutual. She thought she heard an exclamation, but she had hardly time to even think of what she should do—make an advance or pass on—when he turned on his heel, drawing his hat down over his brow, and strode off, keeping, she could see, close under the lee of the hedge. There was nothing for her to do but to pass on.

The neighbourhood of Preene was almost destitute of human life and the roads shady and narrow. There was no gentleman's dwelling for miles round, but about half-a-mile further on was a large farm, the proprietor of which, a substantial yeoman, owned or rented the principal portion of the houses in Preene. A more out-of-the-way little nest could hardly be found. The yeoman grazed and tilled his lands, oblivious of the outer world, and his labourers had not an aspiration beyond their daily needs. The rustic simplicity of the small community might, from a poet's point of view, be primeval innocence; from a vulgar philosophy it was but the crass ignorance of a portion of the inconsiderable *débris* of civilization. No better

place could have been chosen in which to chew the cud of sweet and bitter memory unregarded and in the utter loneliness of a being apart. The place was healthy, and more than once a convalescent had sought its reviving breezes and soothing stillness, to dream himself back into vigorous life.

With this ostensible purpose the robust major had sought its shades. He "had just got well," he said, of a "foreign fever," a malady whose unknown quality accounted to the gaping Hodge for the singular bronze of his visage and European haleness of his aspect.

"Themmin fevers," said Mrs. Farmer Hodge as she discussed her new lodger casually with more interesting topics of farmyard "caddle" at the evening supper, "themmin fevers, 'ave errd zay, 'as to do only with tha innerds; they chucks 'im off martial zudden, an' turns 'im skin to a copper skilly. Thirk 'im 'as bin a zowlger a'm thinkin'. Ees to drink rum an' new milk, an' ees to walk by hizzelf at cow-milkin' night an' mornin'. Waal, ees get noabody here aways to giv' 'im

the time o' day, an' ees can do az 'o pleazes ;" which the major did.

The breakfast-hour of the district was eight o'clock, and until nine not a human form stirred in the roads, not even a tramp—but a tramp was a specimen of mortality unknown to Preene.

Judy rode slowly along, following with her eye the line of the hedgerow which concealed, she felt sure, the mysterious major. Her way home lay round by the rear of the church, which was closed in by thick-set yews, and divided from the main road, which lay some feet below its level, by a low, rough wall. A wicket gate and some uneven stone steps gave outlet to the road, which the hedgerow of the farm joined on to the churchyard wall. The road below curved suddenly round, when it narrowed, becoming little more than a lane, overarched by elms of heavy foliage, the prevailing tree of the district. As Judy turned the curve, scarcely to her surprise, though none the less a shock—for surmise had been active in her acute brain—she saw Mabella's ponies quietly cropping the herbage

at the roadside. The phaeton was empty, and Tubbs, the page, in his seat behind, intent on the *Illustrated Police News*.

Obedying a sudden impulse Judy asked the lad where his mistress was, and was told that she was "a drawing of heffigies in the churchyard, an' a copyin' of the hipituffs."

There was no latent consciousness of further knowledge in Tubbs' round eyes, and Judy without further question set her horse's head homeward. A thought struck her; she turned back and said to the lad:

"You needn't say to Miss Egbert that I have passed, Tubbs. I ought to have been back by this," thus leaving the boy to suppose that she might incur Miss Egbert's censure for her long ride.

Tubbs was Judy's humble but devoted knight, and "lied nobly" when a few minutes later, very much flustered, hot, and cross, Mabella descended the risky steps from her supposed archæological studies, and plumping down in her seat asked him if Miss Judy had passed that way.

Judy contrived to be very late for breakfast

that morning, that she might bring upon herself, as a distraction, a severe lecture from Sybella, the mentor of ways and morals of the family. She was successful. She did not heed, scarcely heard Sybella's diatribe. She felt Mabella's eyes watching her with an almost appealing look.

"Just as if I'd say a word," she said to herself, contemptuous of the assumed imputation of "blabbing." She was debating within herself if she should say to Mabella after breakfast, in a careless way, that she had had a start, for while passing a farmhouse in a lonely road she had seen a man very like the major, but of course it couldn't be him. This would ease Mabella's mind, and she couldn't bear to be thought a spy. But Judy could not give the deception words. Her soul abhorred not only that gross thing a direct lie—most of us do, respectability abjures compromising sins—but its able substitute, a fabrication based on truth. Judy could not "lie nobly." She said nothing.

"This is the last day of the poll," said the squire. "We shall know to-night which wins,

blue or buff. Albany's too confident, I'm afraid. If young Rawson stands by all he promises he will out-radical the radicals. Le Pole goes too far, I think. Sir Janitor's money seems a golden river. He'd better take care of a scrutiny."

"Mr. Rawson wouldn't lend himself to bribery, of that I am sure."

"Not directly," replied the squire.

"The young fellow is fairly square, I think, but he is so busy *talking*, he is not minding what is *doing*. To me the contest seems primed with personal animosity. Did the young men know each other before, I wonder?"

"Yes," said Dulsie, "Mary was saying yesterday that they were at Oxford together."

Judy took into the garden some delicate fish for Tim's breakfast.

"And Miss Prance told me," said Sybella—"she knows Sir Janitor very well—that a friend wrote her from Janitor Hall only yesterday a great account of the canvassing. She—the friend—said that Sir Janitor was working himself into a fever, and that it was

all over the town that Lord Le Pole wants to marry our Judy for the sake of what she *may* have, but that Mr. Rawson is in love with her, and so the young fools hate each other. She says that Lord Le Pole hasn't a chance."

"What vulgar gossip," said Mabella. "I wonder you let Miss Prance tell you such things, Sybella. Judy has only met Lord Le Pole twice. I think it is very indecent of people to speculate on her prospects. Don't you, sir?" appealing to the squire.

"Most mysterious," was his reply, a reply more to his own train of thought than his daughter's challenge. "Le Pole, though, is no fortune-hunter. I wonder if Albany's solicitors, Raymont, Rout and Rally, are trustworthy," and he rose with an air of abstraction and sauntered out on the sands by himself.

"Judy doesn't know her own mind," observed Mabella with apparent inconsequence. "She doesn't really like Mr. Rawson. It is all Mary's absurd fancy."

"She is very well inclined to like him," said Sybella, "but I can see his nature is not sympathetic enough for hers. He has

something of his uncle in him, a hard determination in carrying out an aim. That will give him a reserve which will repel Judy. I suspect, too, he looks down on woman as a whole; but he's in love, there's no doubt of that—too much in love to understand Judy's idiosyncrasies, and, take my word for it, he'll never, never win her heart, though he thinks he will, and she fancies he has. Mary is a great bungler, with all her managing: she doesn't take in little Judy. It is only since this election that she has woken to Mr. Rawson's merits, but if she caught a whisper of Le Pole's liking her, I rather suspect she would go to sleep on them again."

"I wish papa wouldn't go out in the sun," said Dulsie. "Don't you think"—addressing both sisters—"that he has been looking ill lately?"

They answered together in the affirmative.

"I wish he would stay more here," said Mabella, "but he frets all the time he is away from the Hall. He is a hale man yet for his years, eighty next birthday," and she sighed.

"Dr. Clarke said he ought to be kept free

of worry," said Sybella. "The action of the heart is feebler than it should be in a man of his constitution."

"The place is too much for him now," said Mabella irritably. "Ah, if he had only had a son; only a man could help him in managing such a property."

"More than one man has thought that, to his disappointment," said Sybella aggressively.

"Neither of you has had the grace to ask who took the prize for pelargoniums and cacti at the flower-show," put in Dulsie, with a peace-making coax in her voice.

Judy came in opportunely, followed by Tim, who, having demolished his breakfast, was now intent upon a snooze. As he trotted past Mabella he seized a little woollen shawl which had fallen at her feet, and carried it off to his house, dragging it after him piece-meal as he entered, and adjusting it to his liking with his nose.

"Oh, Tim, my shawl," cried Mabella as she hastened to the rescue, but only to retreat ignominiously.

The little sybarite, with an end of the ab-

ducted garment between his teeth, his forelegs fixed like pegs on the remainder, set her at defiance with a cannonade of growls and smothered yelps. On guard, and giving his lair a few finishing pokes, he curled himself up, his aggressive nose at attention towards the door of his castle, and subsided into a lumbering slumber of snores and grunts.

"Well, Tim," said Mabella in an aggrieved voice, "you might have kept to the mats. As it is, you haven't left a decent middle in one of them, you little luxurious Turk you."

"He doesn't like middlin' things," laughed Judy, "so he has taken the shawl to make up their deficiencies, for to my certain knowledge he has two inside his house at this moment. There's a touch of east in the wind this morning, and he knows it. He's afraid of the Egbert gout. You see, he's a very precautionary dog is Tim."

"And a very presumptuous one, too, like some bipeds," snapped Sybella, restraining the inclination to laugh Judy's absurdities always evoked.

"You were saying something about the

flower-show, Dulsie," put in Judy hastily, to avert the retort she saw primed on Mabella's lips. "Did you take any prizes?"

"You little traitor," replied Dulsie smiling. "Marlby Grange's Gloriana took the first prize in pelargoniums."

"Oh, Dulsie, I only named it, I could not help their sending it."

Judy spoke on her defence, yet penitently.

"Of course not, child, the plant deserved it by all accounts. I must get a cutting. Parton is divided between vexation at his first defeat and admiration of the plant; but I only got third prize, for Weaver took the second. I have had nice work with Parton; he says Weaver has outstepped his *prerogative*. I fancy he thinks 'prerogative' means a degree in horticulture. Nothing touched our cacti, however."

Mabella had gone into the garden, and was walking up and down on the lawn in front of the open windows of the breakfast-room.

Judy usually went through the garden by a back gate to Seapinks. To avoid Mabella, who, she felt intuitively, was watching for her,

she slipped out by the front door and took her way to her friend. Since the day Mabella had given Elsie the repulsive reception consequent on the major's meretricious narrative, the latter had not visited at the Lodge, and when by chance they met, as if by tacit agreement they ignored each other's presence.

This, of course, had been observed by Judy. She, to herself, always connected the major's sudden departure with Elsie, but as he had gone, and Mabella appeared in no way regretful, she was beginning to dismiss the matter from her mind, thinking that perhaps Elsie had given Mabella a timely warning, which, though she had acted on it, she still resented. Mabella's manner puzzled her. At times gay to absolute merriment, at others *distrain* and irritable, and not unfrequently morose and repellent. Very seldom now was she her natural self.

"Poor Mabella," Judy would say to herself, "she has had a great disappointment ; I do hope she will never fall in love again."

Dulsie only was sympathetic, but beyond some buoyant words of cheer during the first

blank days of desertion, she, too, avoided any mention of the gay cavalier and his mysterious disappearance.

It was by no means the first time that Dulsie's sympathy had been drawn out by mischance in Mabella's love affairs. That these should end in vapour seemed natural to Dulsie. Mabella was "so difficult to please."

Sybella was by no means assured that this particular amour had come to the usual untimely end of its predecessors, but skilled as she was in piecing suspicious incidents together, in this instance she was completely thrown off her guard. The letters came by the post in the same open manner as usual, Mabella showing no undue interest in their arrival; and but for her irritability, which she also set down to disappointment, her sister saw nothing to lead her to suppose that the handsome *sabreur* was anything to the impressionable Mabella but a memory. He was not the first cavalier who had "loved and ridden away" from Egbert Hall. She saw nothing to keep her suspicions alive, but they were alive, and tinder for the first spark.

The three sisters were aware of their father's wishes for Judy in the direction of Lord Le Pole, and each in her own way had their fulfilment much at heart; but they were sensible women and knew better than to attempt to forward the matter by any overt act. They wisely kept silence, and they did not admit Mrs. Aylmere into their confidence.

"It would turn her head," said Sybella; "the Rawson possibility is even too much for her under its present aspect."

To this Mabella and Dulsie assented. There were one or two subjects upon which the sisters were at one. First and foremost, family pride, then love for their father, and lastly, affection for Judy. That they evidenced their feelings in different fashions was in the nature of their temperaments, Sybella less tenderly than the others in Judy's case. She had an ever present rankling regret for her own vanished youth, and so found it difficult to forgive youth a possession she could not only never recover, but never simulate, for Sybella's long nose—it had passed for aquiline in her plump youth—had an ingrained roseate hue at the tip

and her once delicate bloom had given place to a shade of faint yellow, relieved by manifold freckles. She did not deceive herself, she knew her youth had gone, and time had brought no equivalent in the comely attractions of middle age. But some evidences still lingered. Her hair was soft and plentiful, not tinged with grey, only the sheen gone; her teeth were good, if rather long, and not so white as once; and her eyes, if they had lost their brightness and their lashes had become stubby, were still expressive. All else, face, person, manner, were angular.



CHAPTER XI.

“Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O sea,
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.”

“Enemies carry about slander, not in the form in which it took its rise.”

“No, Elsie dear, no politics or antics either to-day,” was Judy’s greeting to her friend, who, as usual, awaited her in her little sanctum.

“I have that very uncanny thing, a secret, and I don’t know what to do with it. Dear, hush,” as Elsie, a little deprecatingly, put up her hand. “Do not fear, I am not going to turn this into a confession-box, but I sadly want your counsel.”

“I was only warning you not to speak so loudly, the balcony is beneath. I hear the mellifluous prattle of La Belle Catty, and scent the *mille fleur* of La Divine Creamy,” and Elsie returned Judy’s good-morning kiss.

She was never a woman of many words. A look, a touch, a gesture, were often her only vocabulary, and vocal with sympathetic meaning. She kept Judy's hand and drew her on to a stool at her feet. But Judy's ready speech seemed to fail her. She did not look up.

"Which is it, Judy, buff or blue?" Elsie whispered.

"I don't know," said Judy, "the ballot is not over yet; but it's not Ned Rawson and it's not Le Pole," she spoke as if half in banter; "it's just that fascinating, horrid, mysterious man, the major."

Elsie withdrew her hand with a jerk, and Judy heard a little gasp like a sob. With exquisite tact she did not look up. She stooped and picked up a stray thread, which she twirled round her finger. She continued in a pettish tone:

"They say that he was making love, as the housemaids have it, to cousin Mabella, and I just didn't like to believe it. She is so kind and good. I don't like speaking about it even now, it seems like treachery, but it's not, for I love her dearly."

She again stopped, broke the thread and threw it away. Elsie still kept silence, but she was pale.

“Oh, it’s all so horrid, it is,” she cried at last, the pent-up tears breaking forth like summer rain. “I am just like their own child, and they all trust me so, and here I have come upon a secret, and I must tell it for their sakes, and I don’t know who to tell it to. Mamma—well, they are not very fond of dear mother, and she doesn’t understand out-of-the-way things. Then cousin Egbert, he is just the one I don’t want to tell it to, it would grieve him so, and yet it may all be a bottle of smoke, and dear old Mabella may only be—well, she *is* so good-hearted. Oh, Elsie, can’t you see it all, don’t *you* understand what I have to tell? And indeed I would not have told you—though I know I can trust you quite, for family secrets ought to be family secrets—but I have no one else I can trust, and—and——”

Judy dried her eyes, and with a sudden resolve she looked her companion suddenly full in the face.

“And you are just the one that ought to be

told, for you alone know all about him—the major, I mean.”

“Judy,” said Elsie in a cold whisper.

“Don’t speak like that, Elsie, or I shall break my heart. I am no spy, though I did see you nearly faint the first day you met him here ; he gave you a piece of paper to read, too. I saw it all. I couldn’t help it, for, you see, I am so unfortunately sharp ; but I never breathed it to mortal, and—Elsie, I know you’ll believe me—I tried to forget all about it.”

Elsie pressed her cold lips on the agitated girl’s brow.

“But to-day, this very morning, I saw him—Major Tyler—at Preene. He saw me, too, and a minute after there was Mabella’s phaeton and she not in it ; it was waiting for her outside the churchyard.”

“Judy, dear, what can I do ?”

Elsie’s voice sounded hollow. She did not deny Judy’s impeachment ; for the moment she hardly seemed to know what she should say.

“Oh, Elsie, won’t you tell Mabella all you know about him ? You won’t let him marry her ? It would kill cousin Egbert.”

“No, Judy,” she spoke in a whisper, “not if I can prevent it. He shall not bring the dishonour of his name into your cousin’s family. Listen to me, darling; I am not going to take you into my confidence, because you are too young and innocent. I cannot tell you now all the story of that man’s vileness, but do not fear. You did well to come to me. No other could help you as I can. You are right, I do know him.”

She paused in thought.

“It is due to you to tell you something, if only to show you I trust you even as you have trusted me,” she resumed painfully.

The words seemed wrung from her.

“I loved that man, darling, loved him as women love who for their love stake honour, life, and all their slavish passion leaves of self. I knew that I had talents; it was not these drew him to me and kept him by me. He did not value them, seemed impatient of them, as of something he thought unwomanly; and, Judy, I was ashamed of the gifts God had given me, for, child, I only felt with his senses, even things holy, and thought nothing

good that was not so in his eyes. I was no longer Elsie Eber, I was only a *lower* Geoffrey Tyler. Self had passed, not 'in music,' but in bitter wailing, out of sight. Was that the love that was meant to bind two souls in a perfect union, the love which God meant to form a perfect whole? It was not, it was not. The awaking told me it was not."

She covered her face with her hands as if in perfect self-abasement.

Judy looked up at her, pale and still, in her large innocent eyes tear-drops welling.

"It was a hot simoon, Judy, scorching blossoms of better things, blighting every form of good. The learned scientists of the day, Judy, tell us of the new forces evidenced in nature; they will lay bare their secrets to you; they will chain the lightning and tell you how mountains are moved; they will change the currents of rivers and fling back the encroaching tide; but"—in an uncontrollable agony of memory Elsie rose to her feet and, flinging her head back, raised her clasped hands on high—"but will they tell you from whence comes the fire that, entering

a woman's breast, not all nature's mysterious forces, not all man's God-like power, can ever extinguish? Whence comes it?"—her eyes were closed—"from heaven or from hell?"

Her hands fell prone at her side, her head drooped forward, then in piteous request for a something long sought in vain, a something not of earth, she opened wide her great eyes and with a sob of anguish cried :

"Not from hell, for God is merciful, and will not suffer even the evil to be tormented before their time. Not from heaven, or heaven would be no heaven to me, *but from earth.*"

Again she raised her hands and hid her face as in very shame.

"From earth, low grovelling earth, a fact the great scientists can only know to bow to, before which they are dumb."

There were no tears in the dry burning eyes that once again sought the awe-stricken girl at her feet; only an anguish of pain unutterable.

"Yes, child, God is merciful, earth—fire, is not eternal, it will finish its work *here.*"

She put Judy's hand on her heart, fluttering beneath her breast.

"And then, dear, *rest*."

Judy drew the tempest-tossed woman back to her seat and laid her head in her lap. She did not ask any questions, she did not utter one sympathizing word, but her arms were clasped round Elsie as if they would shield her from the stormy blast and tempest and never let her go.

It was Elsie who first broke the silence.

"Child," she said, a thrilling tremor in her low voice, "my little child friend, your feet are on the same threshold on which I stood just ten years ago. I had no one to guide my impetuous steps, no one to whisper a warning word in my entranced ear. I rushed in where angels fear to tread, and I fell."

Judy looked up with a sudden scare in her eyes.

"Oh, no, little Judy," she continued in mournful scorn at what the girl's look implied, "I kept the letter of the law; in man's eyes I am clean every whit, only in my own I am vile. But it is not of myself I would

“speak now, it is of you. I, too, dear, am unfortunately sharp,” she tried to smile, “and I have gathered together the bright threads that are weaving the romance of your young life. You do not know your heart yet, but you will be put to the test soon. How will you stand it?”

Her words were almost stern. Under an influence she could not resist Judy looked up and whispered :

“I know what you mean, Elsie ; I will ask God.”

That was all she said.

“And He only will not return a serpent.”

The words were bitter, but very tenderly came the next :

“The world laughs, dear, at a young girl’s romance, and men sneer at her heroes ; they can discern the face of the sky, but not its inner significance. They do not know, for they are blind, that only pure hearts have high aspirations, that only noble minds have lofty ideals. Do not swerve one hair’s breadth from yours, Judy ; from Him came your power to love, and from Him will come your power

to do. I had no lofty ideal, so *I did not ask God.*"

"You have now, Elsie, have you not?" whispered Judy pityingly.

"Yes, child; but should it ever be embodied, it will not be for me. Like to like, little Judy," again the bitterness returned.

"You are less merciful to yourself than God, Elsie," said Judy a little resentfully; "what He has cleansed that call not thou common or unclean. He can make you as pure as Himself. Do you set man above Him?"

"Judy, darling, you cannot understand; you will never understand. Mine is a stronger spirit than yours, but if you can never soar to the height I fain would reach now, you will never touch the depth I have touched in those sad days that are gone. Passion-stained and passion-wrecked, let the healing earth take my body; the spirit will then get its wedding garment and stand in the courts of God *to go out no more.*"

A long silence fell on the twain, and for long minutes the "beating of their own hearts was the only sound they heard."

Then Elsie rose gently and poured water into a basin, to which she added rose-water.

“Bathe your face, Judy,” she said; “I envy your tears.”

It was characteristic of Judy when she gave her confidence to give it without reserve, so now she asked no question of Elsie as to the means she would use to save her cousin. She had said she would, and that sufficed for Judy. As she passed slowly downstairs to take her way home she was met by Mrs. Horseman, who carried her off to the dining-room, where she found her mother holding confidential converse with Miss Prance on a *vis-à-vis*. Mrs. Trelawney was there also, flirting, *faute de mieux*, with Mr. Green the curate; and the divine Creamy, posed to admiration in the deep window, was languidly fanning herself, every movement of her lovely form an action of grace. Mrs. Horseman was at her *escritoire*, scrutinizing a long list of names.

“Judy dear,” she cried, without turning round, “come here, I want to confide in you,” and she smiled.

Judy was grave and a little pale. She made her acknowledgments to the company with unwonted quietness, and then knelt on a low seat at Mrs. Horseman's side.

"You know Lady Albany, do you not?" asked the latter.

"No," said Judy, "only Lord Albany."

"But your cousins do?"

"Oh, yes."

"We want her as one of our lady-patronesses for this ball."

"What, the Sandycot ball?"

Mrs. Horseman nodded her head.

Judy, in return, shook hers.

"Oh, yes, it's quite feasible; electioneering makes people come down a condescending step. If we strike while the iron is hot, we may manage it."

"The election will be over to-day," said Judy.

"My dear child, to be a candidate for a borough is to bid for popularity. If Lord Le Pole wins, his mother will think it her duty to patronize the 'middle classes,' for, you know, Sandycot is a mixture; and if he loses, she

will hope for better luck next time. I have no fear on her score; it's only how to do it simply and yet with proper dignity. I don't know any of the family, but I thought Miss Egbert would, perhaps, make the request."

"Well, I'll ask her, and if she agrees and is successful, perhaps she will let me go to the ball."

"You, Judy! Of course you would come at any rate."

"I should like to, but, you see, my cousins are just a little ex—no, old-fashioned in their notions, and wanted my first ball to be the county one, which will be at Nettlethorp in the winter. They all came out there, and then they each went to an Almack's, and they want me to do the same, excepting the Almack's of course."

"Well, you will take this note for me to Miss Egbert, and we'll see. I hope Lord Le Pole will win, don't you?"

There was just a bit of curiosity in Mrs. Horseman's frank eyes as she closed her note and gave it to Judy.

"I," she returned simply, "suppose the people will know best. I am not sure which I wish for. Who are to be the other patronesses?" she asked abruptly.

"I, for one, and Mrs. Beaumorris for another. Creamy," she said softly, "I really think we must ask Lady Rose Dewhart."

"She is *so* ugly," replied the beauty, shutting her languid eyes, as if from something unpleasant.

"I have been trying to convince Dewhart of that ever since I came here," said Catty with a soft purring voice, in imperceptible mimicry of her rival's tone and manner, "but in vain. He can't take in two things at once, and he hasn't got over the one fact yet that she is 'a ladyship,' as he always calls her. But yes, Mrs. Beaumorris *is* right, she *is* ugly," and Catty, too, closed her mischievous orbs.

Every one laughed but Miss Prance, who was obtuse.

"She has good diamonds," said Creamy; "we might do worse."

"Agreed to, then?" said Mrs. Horseman,

appealing to the company, who unanimously replied in the affirmative.

"Some men," said Catty, "where beauty is concerned, are born colour-blind."

"I have not found that an incurable disease; there is beauty, and beauty."

Creamy spoke with a smile of conscious power.

"Poor Mr. Dewhart," laughed Mr. Horseman, who always derived keen enjoyment from the delicate word-tilting of the rival beauties, "poor Mr. Dewhart, I fear you dazzle him, O superb Trelawney."

Catty rose to leave, warned by a timepiece on a console that the admiral's luncheon-hour had come.

"Ah, I never thought of that," she cried with the most charming mixture of archness and *naïveté*. "I shall leave him then," looking at Creamy, "to a milder light," and with a valedictory kiss of the hand all round she was off.

Miss Prance, who was what the Sandycot people called one of the "leading ladies of the town"—a status attained through her

father, the chief doctor of the place—with a colour not a little heightened now strode across the room and sat down by Mrs. Beaumorris on a conspicuous seat placed in the centre of the deep window.

“The admiral had better keep a sharp lookout,” she said with what was intended for a facetious smile, but which was only a spiteful grin, “or his high-flyer, as Mr. Rawson calls her, will heave anchor and be off.”

“Shade of Sir Boyle Roche!” cried Mrs. Horseman, while Judy laughed till the tears came.

Miss Prance, who affected metaphor, thought she had made a hit.

Mr. Green had worked his way, being naturally deprecatory in distinguished company, to the attractive quarter of the room which held Judy, and Mrs. Horseman was putting some finishing touches to the ball-list.

Mrs. Aylmere was drawing on her gloves preparatory to her departure, and Judy, in obedience to her nod, had risen in readiness to take her leave, too.

“Sandycot has been very fortunate hither-

to," continued Miss Prance, addressing the room, "and I must say it has never had occasion to assert itself. If, however, it has any hope of retaining the distinguished reputation it has gained as a *recherché*, tip-top fashionable summer resort, it must be more careful whom it admits into its exclusive circles. There was that Major Tyler, why, he was everywhere and now he is nowhere; we really ought to ask who's who before we give them the shibboleth, don't you think so, Mrs. Beaumorris?"

"I think whatever Miss Prance thinks," was the sleepy reply.

"No one knows who Mrs. Trelawney was," continued Miss Prance obtusely. She did not notice the angry glow on Judy's cheek, the look of utter disgust on Creamy's face, the gathering satire in Mr. Horseman's eyes, or the awakening attention of her hostess. She floundered on, "I believe she is Irish, scarcely a warrant for respectability in the present state of the country. She has a Fenian look about her, I think."

"I am Irish," said Mr. Green.

“Exceptions prove the rule,” she said, pawing with her substantial foot; “but wherever she comes from, and whoever she is, she is a bold-faced flirt, and some one ought to warn the admiral. He is getting suspicious, for only yesterday I met him walking by himself, and we had a long talk. He said his wife had gone to lawn tennis at the club, but I had seen her going towards the sands and *not alone*. So I got him to walk in that direction, and there, sure enough, we met her and that *roué*-looking Colonel Vere, whose wife hasn’t been dead two months. The admiral could hardly believe his eyes. ‘Is this where the club plays lawn tennis?’ he said, and with that he pushed the colonel aside and made her take his arm and walked her off home. I walked back with the colonel, and warned him well about her.”

Poor Catty! The keen wit she had turned on the “select lady of Sandycot,” as she called her, was being avenged now.

Mrs. Horseman had returned to the outer world at the beginning of Miss Prance’s vulgar tirade, but the indignant reproof

hovering on her tongue had been stayed by a sign from her husband, which she interpreted to mean "give her her head," and this, chafing, she did.

When she ceased Mr. Horseman "sneaked," as his wife expressed it, out of the room. He knew the punishment Miss Prance had earned, and he "meanly," as she declared, left her to inflict it alone. This she did on the instant.

"Miss Prance," she said, standing up, the list in her hand, "this is the first time I have ever had the pain of listening, in my own house, to slander, and I feel more ashamed than I can express, or you, I fear, can understand. I have tried to be kind to my neighbours, and have set aside some usually restrictive social differences, for especially in small communities one feels a neighbour's claim. But I have made one mistake"—she curtsied to Miss Prance—"and I beg to apologize in the most humble manner to my friends." She turned to the rest of the visitors, emphasizing the last word. "It is a mistake, however, I shall not repeat. I can forgive a

solecism, but not a gross violation of the law of Christian charity, if not of truth."

Then with excessive *hauteur* she bowed to Miss Prance, who had reared up and now looked ready to strike out.

No one uttered a word. Mr. Green had sidled to the door, and as if inspired with the chivalrous idea of freeing a captive he flung the door open with a swing. The action brought the rampant babbler to her senses. A hasty glance at the faces round quickened her step to the significant opening, where she stopped and veered round with an evident valedictory intent, but meeting Mrs. Horseman's eyes she thought better of it. She dropped her glove; Mr. Green picked it up. Then her tongue was loosed.

"You a minister of the gospel," she screamed, "and let a Sunday-school teacher in your church and secretary to the Maternity Bags Club and the Society for Free Bibles to the Unconverted be martyred at the stake for witnessing to truth!" She did not know what she said. "You a faithful shepherd of your flock, and let your sheep be worried by

wolves! Ah, I shake off the dust of my feet at this door, and at you, too, you smooth-faced sneak, for if you do this in the *green* tree, what will you not do in the *dry*?" Her "hit" restored her composure, and with an air of triumph she pranced off.

The absurdity of the woman's rage and speech was too much for Judy. As the hall-door banged after her, she sat down to laugh in utter helplessness of mirth.

That night sleep did not visit Elsie Eber's aching eyes, nor did Mrs. Horseman close hers till the dawn had begun to break on the still, sad sea. Then her sleep was dreamful and uneasy, for heart and brain were full of the sweet fair Jewess's life history.



CHAPTER XII.

“ Oor thistles bloomed sae fresh and fair,
An’ bonnie were oor roses,
The Whigs came o’er us like a blight
An’ withered a’ oor ’poses.
Awa’, Whigs, awa’.”

MR. POSSER was earnest over a proof which, by its appearance, would cost the compositor in re-setting not a little extra work. There was a network of telegraph-lines over its face, and the margins were filled in with manuscript notes. Still he did not seem satisfied. The editorial timepiece pointed to 2 a.m., and the *Weekly Sun* was due for delivery only four hours later. The little den was cloudy with tobacco-smoke; utter quiet reigned. With an impatient oath Mr. Posser put his hand on the ear-tube lying by his side—it communicated with the printers’ room in the heights above—but before he could lay his lips to its mouth the door cautiously opened and Mr. Rout crept quietly in.

“All alone, Posser?”

“Yes, sir,” was the reply, given in a tone of relief; “I was just wishing I could have word of you,” and he drew a chair forward, into which Mr. Rout subsided.

“Read this,” said Posser, handing the disfigured proof to the “governor,” as technically he described the proprietor of the organ he represented.

“Have you a clean one?” asked the latter after a cursory glance at the contents.

“Yes, but not a revise, of course.”

Mr. Rout read the one now handed to him more carefully.

“You saw it this morning?” observed Mr. Posser in a questioning tone.

“I know, I know; you have my note objecting, I hope?”

Posser nodded.

“Take care of it,” and then Mr. Posser’s visitor tore the corrected proof into shreds.

Posser stared.

“This can go up as it is,” said Mr. Rout, giving Posser back the clean proof; “as you say, we must be either fish or flesh. I have

parted with my interest in the paper, so you can have it your own way. You will receive a communication from my successor in the morning. At present, I may tell you, as you are going to press, that he is not on my client's side. I have thought over the whole matter, and, whatever my own particular bias may be, I cannot in honour hold the anomalous position of proprietor of a radical paper and be election agent to a conservative candidate. I was not aware his lordship was so ultra-tory."

"Tory!" exclaimed the puzzled Posser; "there's not a hair to choose between him and Rawson; if there was, it would be on his lordship's side. He is not so practical as Rawson, and one can never tell the length metaphysics will lead a young fellow to. I can't understand it. It seems to me you had the best hand. Sir Oscar was a moderate, and as Le Pole flies his colours he *ought* to have carried the factories to a man; they don't analyze a fellow's divergences."

"I have to look at every side," said Mr. Rout, repressing his impatience. "I am neither

a keen politician nor a philanthropist, and I cannot afford, for either a client or a principle, to damage my property. You spoke truly when you said we ought to stick to our own colours — ultra-radicalism ; that's toning down ; *aut Cæsar aut nullus* ; so as I received a sudden offer for the concern I have closed. Mr. Patch, Mr. Rawson's agent, has just left me. I fancy you will receive a visit from him soon. All things considered, I am lucky. I could not do my client justice with this round my neck," and he put his hand on a stray number of the *Weekly Sun*.

There was nothing more to say for the present. The printers were calling for corrected proofs, and Mr. Posser, feeling the necessity of concentration of thought, shunted the train of bewildering conjecture and suspicion. For the present the line was clear ; he had things his own way, and Oxminster should have an eye-opener at cockcrow.

Mr. Rout got back to his hotel unobserved and a few minutes afterwards Mr. Patch occupied his vacated seat at the editorial office.

"By Jingo," exclaimed Mr. Butts, of the Spotted Dog public-house, a radical of too extreme views to admit the necessity of any boundary at all, "by Jingo, the *Sun* has opened its eyes at last," and he flourished the damp sheets of that emancipated organ above his head.

It was breakfast-hour and the bar was full. Mr. Butts was glib of tongue, and with appropriate gesture and emphasis he gave his audience Mr. Posser's "eye-opener," which was received with acclaim.

"That tells a fellow things plain," said one.

"Posts a man up in his rights," said another.

"Doant it giv' it to the nobs," cried a third.

"A allus said as Sir Oscar 'ad made his own out o' Oxminster," said a fourth.

"What is it as Sir Janitor ses about capital?" asked a big-browed, keen-eyed mechanic, draining his third pint.

"That he's not a goin' to spend his'n's capital a layin' a field to field, like the

prodigal son in the Bible," answered Mr. Butts in free rendering of some recorded falutin of the town's benefactor; "that it's there to turn over for 'em as wants it, an' we all wants it, doant we? I puts it to the vote, gentlemen. The workin' man 'as a right to capital; who ses no, let 'im up with 'is 'and."

Not a finger stirred.

"Then I'll stand ees all round."

Every mug was filled.

"Here's to Sir Janitor Tomlinson, the man as knows the rights o' capital, an' as doesn't keep a score agin it like Sir Oscar did."

The mugs were drained, and the freeborn electors of Oxminster felt elevated in more senses than one. As they filed out Mr. Butts called after them:

"An' we're to have a daily every day, we are. It's to be called the *People's Spokesman*, an' it's only to be a 'alfpenny. Be blest if they ain't a postin' of it over the Blues."

"Hoorrooge, my boys!" and in an answering chorus the electors echoed, "Hoorrooge!"

Mr. Curte printed and published the *People's Spokesman*, which, disowning any connection

with the *Weekly Sun*, left that organ so far in the shade it seemed a matter of doubt if it had not undergone a partial eclipse.

"I have nothing to do with such principles, Mr. Patch," remonstrated his client in indignant accents. "This is unmitigated revolution."

Mr. Patch laughed.

"Only an escape of sewer gas," he said. "It requires something very strong to rouse a *respectable* constituency. Get them in smelting order, and Rout may send in his little bill with 'regret.'"

"I reserve the right," said the young man, by no means satisfied, "to disown any connection with such gutter filth," and he tore the offending sheet of the *People's Spokesman* in two and trod on it.

"Certainly, and it will be absolutely necessary for you to do so, my dear sir," Mr. Patch spoke confidently, "but not yet awhile. The last day of polling will do."

"And I shall take very good care," continued Ned, "to urge Sir Janitor to take the *Spokesman* from Mr. Curte. No respectable

publisher would put his name to such a production as this. For my part, I am sorry he touched the press at all."

"He'll soon get tired of it," and Mr. Patch winked. "Just take things a little easy till the fight is over; the least thing now might turn the tide against us. Things have gone smoother the last two days; Rout's not so sharp as he was. Whoever got this up, though, has his wits about him. It is a grand idea, a *People's Spokesman*. Did you read the programme?"

Ned made a gesture of dissent and disgust.

"Well, the working man is called on to express his opinions openly and without reserve in its columns. Just picture to yourself the delight of Mr. Butts to see himself in print."

The day after Mr. Rout's interview with Sir Janitor he sent to London for another "hand," as he expressed it, in the person of a particular scrivener known to him personally, a man of undoubted respectability and decided conservative principles. This individual, Klear by name, he told off to accompany Lord Le Pole

in his personal canvass, and to attend him at all times during the contest. "If we divide," he said to his client, "we shall have more influence and do double work. Klear is a townsman: he knows the people."

Each night Mr. Klear went over his day's progress to his principal, giving him a list of persons called on, with particulars of the interviews, and each succeeding day Mr. Rout went over the same ground in person with a result that would rather have astonished his noble and confiding client.

Both candidates spoke well, and both pledged themselves pretty liberally on general questions for the future. On direct points Lord Le Pole's fencing was perhaps more subtle.

"He do use such a lot o' larned words, he do, a doant know where to hev 'im," said a puzzled heckler; but his bearing was so conciliatory, his patience and gentleness with even the roughest rough so invariable, and his pleasant face and smile so irresistible, that his platform utterances and those from the balcony of the hotel were generally received

with unanimous cheering. Ned's oratory was of a different flavour ; it was incisive, and he was not gifted with patience. He had a good sound "No" when occasion called, but, measured man to man, he went further than his opponent, and though he was made the aim more than once of some eggs that were not wholesome, and cats that were not pleasant—practical expressions that somehow were never directed against his opponent—on the whole it might be said that he was the popular candidate.

The new paper, although it out-Heroded Herod, proclaimed itself in favour of Sir Janitor's nephew, giving his speeches a flavour scarcely recognizable by the owner's palate, nor to its taste. With equal impartiality it travestied those of the adversary with demolishing effect. But the London reporters, giving the outside of matters, spoke big things of the chance of the conservative candidate.

The London season was on the wane. In a few days the opera would be closed, and then the gay-plumaged migrants would begin

to fly south. Lady Albany and her daughter, giving up a royal garden-party, came down to Marlby Grange to welcome back the successful candidate—the possibility of defeat never even occurred to them. Their daily food had been the reassuring *Morning Post* and conciliatory *Times*.

“I think,” said Lord Albany to his wife on the night of her arrival, “that we will defer any arrangements for a dinner to the people till Le Pole comes down. It might indeed be well to give it at the harvest-home.”

“Why, papa,” cried Lady Olivia, the youngest and liveliest of the daughters of the house of Albany, “that would be a day after the fair. There’s not a girl about the place, I am told, but has got a blue something ready. Dicks”—the head gardener—“told me that his wife had bought a blue gown, and we brought down a whole web of orthodox cotton.”

Lord Albany looked harassed.

“Let us make quite sure, Livia, my pet,” he said kindly. “These are revolutionary times. We shall know to-morrow for certain.”

The morrow came. The earl was seated with his family in the tea-room and was enjoying his reviving cup. The Cricket with a blue flag was crying "Leppo for ever!" at the top of his childish treble, and Garth, a white deerhound belonging to Le Pole, lying full length across the rug, had his nose pointed to the door as in expectancy of some one. An air of anticipation pervaded the lady part of those present. Movements in that well-ordered aristocratic mansion were ghost-like in their imperceptibility, so a side door had opened, and a footman with a silver salver, on which lay a yellow missive, stood before the earl before a sound notified his coming. The door closed noiselessly behind the automaton, who neither by look nor sign showed the least consciousness of the importance of the document of which he had been the bearer, but he was perfectly aware that it contained a telegram giving the result of his young master's candidature for Oxminster. A glance at the earl's visage would, he knew, give him the information he, with his fellow-servants, desired, but for this he would have to wait.

"One thousand!" was the earl's answer as the telegram fluttered to the ground.

The tone in which these words were spoken made Lady Albany look up sharply.

"You are ill, Albany," she cried, rising. "You should take things quieter. Of course it is a very gratifying majority. Olivia, ring for some wine."

"No," said the earl, recovering himself, "time enough for the servants to know our disgrace."

Lady Albany looked frightened. She thought her husband was wandering; that the goodly success had been too much for his mind, harassed as she knew it had been of late by business worries. She laid her hand kindly on his arm. He looked up at her with hollow eyes.

"You don't understand, my love," he said; "the majority is Mr. Rawson's."

A silence, painful in its intensity, fell on the room, and Garth, rising majestically, came to the earl's side, thrust his "piteous nose" into the nerveless hand from which had fallen the ill-omened missive, and fixed his eyes,

full of dumb sympathy, on the haggard face. There was a mournful pride in the dog's attitude. His ears were well back, and his long gaunt body, so expressive of tradition and canine aristocracy, harmonized with the noble figure drooping dejectedly forward like a tall tree weakened at the roots. Then the Cricket, who had been the last few minutes trying to mend his flag, which he had torn, suddenly started up and resumed his scamper round the room, crying "Leppo for ever!"

* * * * *

Dinner was over at Egbert Lodge, but the quiet party still lingered over fruit and wine. Mabella was more than usually attentive to the squire and conciliatory in her manner to Sybella. She looked ill and jaded. Dulsie complained of rheumatic pains; the squire was inattentive and abstracted; even Judy added to the general depression by a kind of preoccupied melancholy, so unlike her usual mood that Sybella's sharp eyes observed her furtively. It was a sultry evening, and the windows, which were down to

the ground, were wide open. Suddenly Tim came out of his house, and barked as if at a familiar step. Judy looked across the lawn.

"It is mamma," she said. "She has a telegram in her hand; the election, I suppose," and in a moment she was at Mrs. Aylmere's side. She hardly knew what answer she expected as she called to her mother, "Who's won, mammy?" neither did she at the moment know what she wished. When, however, Mrs. Aylmere replied in a voice of excitement "Mr. Rawson," she was keenly sensible of a sudden depression, which might have been only sympathy for defeat—for Judy's heart was tender and always went out to the vanquished.

"Whom did you get the telegram from, mamma?" she asked.

"Oh, Miss Prance; she got it from her friend who is staying at Janitor Hall, and she ran over with it to me at once."

"I wish you would not be so intimate with Miss Prance, mamma. They don't like her here, and you heard what Mr. Horseman said to-day."

“Oh, I’m only neighbourly, my love,” was the reply. “She is useful. But just imagine; why, young Rawson is a public man now, and will be one of our wealthiest commoners.”

“Miss Prance is a bird of ill-omen,” said Mabella querulously as she passed on the telegram to her sisters.

“I can’t understand it,” said the squire; “I did think the contest would be closer than Albany seemed to expect, but I certainly did not anticipate this crushing defeat—a thousand majority! If I were Albany I should demand a scrutiny.”

Mrs. Aylmere was sharp. She saw how the land lay, and she held her tongue.

“You don’t seem much elated, Judy,” said Sybella; “I thought you and Mr. Rawson were great friends.”

“And so we are, and I am very glad for his sake that he has such noble work before him, but I can’t help feeling sorry for Lord Albany. He is such a proud man, and he had his son’s success much at heart.”

At this juncture a note was brought to the squire from the secretary of the Sandycot

club, confirming the intelligence received at secondhand from Miss Prance.

"It is quite true," he said, passing the note down the table. "Gunn promised to let me know the last poll; they were pretty even the first part of the day. I can't understand it."

"Lord Le Pole is sure of his seat in the Upper House some day," said Mrs. Aylmere in a consolatory tone. "A career is not of such vital importance to him as to Mr. Rawson."

"Lord Albany's interest in the Cabinet is good," the squire said, just a little haughtily; "but he knows that it is in the Commons a young man can best make his mark. He expected good things of him."

"Le Pole is intellectual, I know," said Sybella; "but I doubt if he is clever in the pushing, driving sense of the word. He is hardly practical enough."

"There are few men of Le Pole's years," returned the squire, "his equal in knowledge and accomplishments. Once thoroughly roused he will do good work, and I very much doubt his taking this defeat quietly. I am just a

little afraid he was too high-toned for the kind of canvass he is sure to have had. Rout wasn't though. I can't understand it."

And that was what every one said—no one could understand it.



CHAPTER XIII.

“Married past redemption.”

“Memory the warder of the brain.”

THE village of Preece was very seldom honoured by the presence of Sandycot visitors. It had no internal attractions or picturesque surroundings, and no traditions save of a narrow local character. There was a species of stagnant melancholy about the place that repelled the casual passers through. Indeed the entire hamlet might some morning have been levelled to the ground and the inhabitants have made tracks for a distant colony and no blank would have been felt in the larger communities in the neighbourhood, nor would any one's wants have been left unsupplied. Preece lived into itself and, to all practical purposes, upon itself. And the utter indifference with which it was regarded by a larger life without was more than equalled

by the supreme unimportance it attached to any world but the little world it called its own.

One evening, however, long after the last urchin had been tucked into his crib, the village shop closed, and the mugs at the little public-house ranged over the bar for the night, Mrs. Horseman's smart basket-chaise drew up at the church door. There were in it that lady herself and Elsie Eber. There was no servant. Mrs. Horseman was her own charioteer. A labourer smoking his last pipe under the centre elm of the green before going home to his "missus" undertook to watch that the pony did not stray, and then the ladies took a discursive saunter round the place. The reconnoitring tyke from farmer Hodge's inclosure gave tongue, and as Mrs. Horseman and her companion stopped at the little wicket from which Judy had seen the major issue, Mrs. Hodge came gaping out, "Most zure," as she said, "thirk Simon Beales had lowzed his donkey among the turnips over the way."

Mrs. Horseman accosted the woman gently.

"You have a lodger," she said; "is he in?"

"Noa, I ain't, an' un beant athin, un goane away," was the uncouth answer.

"When did he go?" asked Elsie.

"Three days a goan, noa two. It vor tha day as tha red cow kicked oop tha pail and spilt tha whoale milkin', it vor."

"Where has he gone?"

"A doant kneow, un never zed narra word, and a never axed. Lunnon, mayhap."

Mrs. Horseman then asked her way to the parsonage. Mrs. Hodge did not understand what a parsonage was, but "noa, there vor noa parson or vicars, narra un, at Preene. A chap as vor a zorter parson—a curate volks call un, she believed—coomed Zundays, and then tha church doors vor open; but noa, she had never noa time, not she, to yor hernself for church, but sent tha children, it kep' 'em vrom caddling, an' her measter, un vor whoame, un vor Zundays, an' altery (cross)."

"He must have left the very day Judy saw him," said Elsie; "there is no use inquiring further. I suppose if he had sought England

round he could not have found a more secluded spot, and yet by a very ordinary chance he was discovered."

The friends walked silently on. When they turned a corner, which took them out of sight, Mrs. Hodge ceased gaping and re-entered her house.

They then turned up a narrow lane which by a side path led to the back of the church, where were the wicket gate and rough steps giving entrance to the graveyard. In this lane were two or three cottages. At the door of one, facing direct on the road, were some tools of the kind used by grave-diggers.

"Mrs. Horseman," said Elsie, suddenly stopping, "I think it would be well if we could get inside the church; this is evidently the sexton's cottage."

For a moment Mrs. Horseman was at fault. She looked with keen questioning into her companion's eyes, then in a flash she understood.

"The register?" she said.

Elsie nodded.

"Impossible. With all her folly she is as

proud as Lucifer, and only foolish where romance is concerned."

"Dear, it is infatuation, and what can *you* know of infatuation in the utter happiness of a perfect union? It is a species of intoxication—only it *cures itself*."

"Her father, Elsie; she would try every means first."

"He would not let her. Who can tell the specious lies he has made her believe? She believes in him as she believes in her Maker. She sees her Maker only through him. Dear friend, goodness and truth have very commonplace shapes on earth; it is only Satan that is transformed into an Angel of Light."

And Elsie, making some steps in advance, knocked at the door of the little cottage. It was opened by an old man, who, to her conciliatory questioning, said his name was Jan Ockle, and that he was the sexton and beadle too, had been for a score of years and more. He was garrulous, and, late though the hour was, willingly led the way up the rough-hewn steps to the church, and showed his visitors inside. At the sight of a promised sovereign

his mild scruples about the sanctity of the vestry and the integrity of the register were overcome. The latter was produced from a secret receptacle, one or two being formed in the wall, which at that part was six feet in thickness. It was a large book, one half filled with entries. Jan did not let it out of his hands. He placed it on "tha parson's desk," as he called a huge, old, black oak box, elevated on trestles in a corner. As he slowly turned over the leaves to find the last page, the one asked for by Elsie, he recounted the names of various parties married within the twelve-month, checking off as he proceeded the different fees he had received with a grumble at each. "He had no luck," he said, "he hadn't; his son had had fever, and he had to go to him and was away a fortnight and more. Mr. Thoms, he had kept tha keys. He vor deaf and anighst blind, he vor, and grumpy, too. There vor a marriage just the week after he had gone, a promiscuous one loike. Noabody seemed to know the parties, zorter gentlevolks they vor. Only Thoms vor present and Mrs. Thoms vor

present ; and Mrs. Thoms, who vor no scholar, she put themmin cross in the register. Miss would zee it there, and a putty cross it vor, just a splash and a scratch. But he vor most zure old Thoms gotten a big fee, although he wouldn't tell, not he. He vor dogged cute, he vor. But he'd got two pigs i' tha sty, and tha missus she'd bought a rare lot o' spanky thingums vor the housen. He should ha goane snacks, he should ; but it didn't matter, he'd hev tha berryin' o' them boath, an' he'd not dig extra deep, he'd not, nor mind how tha mooly vor shooleed in on 'em, he wouldn't."

They let the old man prate on till, the last page arrived at, he slapped his hand on its face and then stood aside to let Elsie look.

"There's hern sloppy splatter," he said ; "it vor tha curate az married 'em, an' he ain't much out. Flagg is un name, a marsh wady kind o' a critter, who allus zed amen as if he were catchin' flies."

And in the dim twilight Elsie read above the offending cross, which a blot had trans-

formed into a blur, the names of Geoffrey Tyler and Mabella Egbert.

They had been man and wife a week.

There was little speech between the friends as they drove back to Sandycot. As if by tacit consent further deliberation was put off for the morrow.

“Elsie, my poor darling,” said Mrs. Horseman as they quietly bade each other good-night, “nothing he could do should hurt you now; he is not more base in your eyes than he was.”

“No, no,” she cried, vainly trying to check a sob which brought with it no tear, “it is not that, it is memory. Oh, the pain of it, the pain of it!”



CHAPTER XIV.

“To have the power to forgive
Is surprise and prerogative,
And 'tis in crowns a nobler gem
To grant a pardon than condemn.

AFTER some slight hesitancy Mabella consented to ask Lady Albany to be one of the patronesses of the Sandycot ball, which, if all went well, was to come off in ten days. A gracious answer was returned, and Sandycot was in a flutter of expectancy. It was understood that “the countess” would bring her daughters, and that her son, Lord Le Pole, would also accompany her.

It was the first time in its annals that Sandycot could boast of the patronage of a peeress on a public occasion, and this particular magnate was, in her own orbit, so to speak, the great lady of her own county. It could hold its own with Nettlethorp now. There was pulling of caps and ducking of heads

there was pulling of wires, too, and moving occultly of heaven and earth for tickets for self and self's followings. Seapinks was besieged, the beautiful Creamy waylaid, and Egbert Lodge inundated. There was a committee, of course, who had rather a bad time of it, but at length the last card was sent out, and impossible was the reiterated negative with which further applications were met. The number agreed on was filled up, and Sandycot's ball-room was not elastic. Necessarily there were disappointments and heart-burnings, and necessarily also there were mistakes; some omissions had been made, and some admissions which would have been better left out, but

"The best-laid plans of mice and men
Gang aft agley,"

and Sandycot was so cosmopolitan—so said Miss Prance, who had utterly failed in obtaining tickets for some very *recherché*, she assured the secretary, friends at a distance.

The new member for Oxminster had accepted an invitation. There had been a little doubt as to the propriety of sending him one,

as Lady Albany's name headed the programme, but Mr. Horseman having given his dictum that politics had nothing whatever to do with society, the discussion ended and Ned got his card.

As usual in the country, men were not over plentiful at Sandycot, and a ball without a full complement of the nobler sex was sure, from a woman's point of view, to be wanting in its chief element of success; preponderance of pretty girls and agreeable young married women being the *desiderata* from a man's. The gentlemen whose credentials were approved of were urged to beat up recruits, and responded hopefully to the appeal. Curates were at a premium, and college youths were quoted at fancy prices. Mr. Green added the name of his whilom friend Mr. Flagg to the list, and the cathedral town of Belchester promised a contingent of half-blown ecclesiastics and scholastic dignitaries. The ———shire militia were in training, and the general invitation sent to the regiment having been accepted, all fears as to a coming short in male guests were at an end.

When all was in train, Judy carried the list of names home to show her cousins. Mrs. Horseman had asked her to do so. The squire had acceded to Judy's request to be present, but only for her sake, he said, and his daughters', who, carried away by the novelty of the occasion, had each ordered a new dress from London. They had also sent for one for Judy, but this was to be a secret for the nonce. Mrs. Aylmere, who had ceased to talk about joining friends further south, furbished up a pretty gray satin and wrote to Jay's for a cap of mitigated affliction. Judy said she would wear the dress she had intended for the Nettlethorp ball, as her cousins had given her their permission to make her partial *début* at Sandycot. The scrutiny of the ball-list called out much cavil and exclusive exception, but Mabella took scarcely any part in the discussion. She listened abstractedly to the tale of names called over by Sybella.

"The Rev. Mr. Flagg," said the latter, putting a stress on the name. "I wonder who he is. I see he is vouched for by Mr. Green. Some college intimate, I daresay. Well, a

man's a man in Sandycot. However, one can always keep to one's own party ; and remember this, Judy, no promiscuous partners ; you're not to consider yourself really out till you've been at the county ball."

But Judy did not hear. She had seen Mabella turn suddenly pale and look much frightened. She was on the watch, to go to her assistance if needed. Judy never gave way to sudden alarms. With a great sigh Mabella recovered herself, and then went quietly out of the room. Judy did not follow. The squire came in with the *Times*.

"Papa," asked Dulsie, "who is Mr. Flagg? He is a clergyman. I fancy I have heard the name."

"Likely enough," he replied ; "he's Mr. Burley's curate, does duty at Preene, I believe ; a great noodle, I am told."

Judy's heart beat hard and fast as she carried the list back to Seapinks. Mrs. Horseman was out, only Elsie was in the drawing-room.

"Elsie," she said, a little resentfully, "I have not asked what you were doing about cousin Mabella, for I felt sure you would do

what would be right, but I want to know now. Mabella has something on her mind ; she is so changed, do tell me what is going to happen."

Then Elsie told her.

" We thought it best, dear," she said, " to keep you in ignorance. It would not do to compromise your position with your cousin, you see ; but as you have asked you have a right to know."

" Oh," said Judy, " that is why she nearly fainted when she heard Mr. Flagg was to be at the ball," and then Judy sat down and indulged in a good cry.

" She will not go," said Elsie, soothing the weeping girl.

" I know Mabella well," replied Judy, drying her tears ; " she won't keep up this deception long. I am confident she will tell Dulsie, or me, perhaps. Oh, how I dread cousin Egbert knowing. It will be his death."

" No, Judy dear, it will be a severe shock to his pride, and his tender nature will be hurt, but sorrow does not often kill very old people, especially good people. You see, worldly things become every day less real to

them, their hold on earth less firm. Their heart becomes dead to the world, and more full of thoughts, and hopes, and joys, into which their very dearest cannot enter. It will pain him, darling, but not kill him. He is a fine old man, of a noble, simple nature, and, you will see, he will act a grand part. It is for her I grieve. Oh, Judy, how she will suffer!"

Judy looked very miserable.

"Oh, this dreadful ball, I would rather it were a funeral, I would."

Then Elsie comforted her friend.

"Let things take their course now," she said; "they are working round to a *dénouement*; meddling would only do mischief."

Elsie was right; his daughter's unworthy conduct did not kill the squire, but it cut him to the quick.

That night she sought him in his little study, and told him all her folly, already half repented of, throwing herself with bitter self-accusation on his mercy. It was long past midnight before they separated, and then even in her turmoil Mabella noted that her father's head was bent on his breast, and that he

walked as if he wanted support ; but he put aside her offered arm, not unkindly, and crept away by himself.

There was a painful ordeal to go through in the morning, painful for the squire and his three daughters. He summoned them into his little study, and in a few simple words, deprecating any resentment or reproaches, announced the foolish step that Mabella had taken. It was some minutes before Sybella could be persuaded to listen to what her father had to say further ; it seemed as if she was the only injured person. Dulsie only wept.

When silence was obtained the squire said, speaking in a shaky voice, but trying bravely to stand upright and firm :

“ I have determined what I mean to do. Of course Mabella has done a very foolish thing, but we should be worse than foolish, even selfishly speaking, not to stand by her. I shall show my reverence for the old name, and my dignity demands it of me. She will need protection, too, and even the partial countenance of her family is the best protection a woman can have. I therefore wish

her to go to Egbert Hall and there receive Major Tyler. She must go at once. They can remain there until our time here is up, and then they can have the Lodge for their future residence, or until Major Tyler has provided another. I myself will announce the fact that he is my son-in-law. No one need know that she married him without my sanction, though all must be aware that she could not have done so with my approval; for of course what is his motive is plain enough, and I am quite prepared to find that he is as destitute of fortune as he has proved himself of honour. I have not asked Mabella any questions as to his birth; *that*, I am convinced, from what I saw of him, will hardly add lustre to the Egbert shield, and it is better so. The world naturally is not curious about the antecedents of obscurity. It is also a consolation to know that the blot Mabella has put upon our escutcheon cannot spread. The name she has taken will end with her."

Vainly trying to keep back the bitter tears of mortification and disappointment, Mabella said brokenly :

“When you come to know him, sir, you will judge him differently. He might be so useful to you in managing the property. But you are mistaken on one point. He comes of a very ancient French family.”

“I think,” said the squire, “we will not discuss the matter further at present; only let there be no misunderstanding as to the future relations between me and Major Tyler, for, except as my guest for a short and specified period, he never enters Egbert Hall. That he must be made to understand. And now, dears,” said the old man, trying to speak in his usual tone of affectionate friendliness, but the effort was evident and pitiful, the blow had gone home, “let there be peace among us. I cannot be with you very long now. Do not embitter my few remaining days with dissensions. Sybella and Dulsie, for your father’s sake forgive Mabella and stand by her: and you, Mabella, be forbearing, for you have done the wrong.”

Then he kissed his daughters and went out of the room, saying he would tell “little Judy” himself.

There was silence among the sisters till the squire's footsteps had died away in the distance, and then Dulsie rose and kissed Mabella, saying with a sob :

"But you might have trusted me. You know I always liked him."

This was more than Sybella's mortal flesh could bear.

"Dulsie," she cried, taking off the edge of her fell wrath on her sympathetic sister, "Dulsie, you are a fool—you always were ; but that is why you like him perhaps. Fools and rogues have a natural affinity."

"Sybella," said Mabella, not without dignity, "you may say what you choose of me, but in my presence you shall not slander my husband. If you cannot show the same consideration my father has shown, you can at least keep silence."

Sybella laughed, and her laugh was not pleasant.

"Pardon, madame," she said. "'They do these things better in France' is a common phrase, so probably the rogue's march the gallant major has stolen on an honourable

family is the distinguished manner in which his illustrious house takes to itself brides. Bride, forsooth!" — her spite and jealousy boiling over. "Ancient French family, indeed! So ancient that chaos gave them their motto in cypher and Adam their arms. You have got a man of *metal*, however, in your spouse. His father was an ironmonger."

Mabella trembled with the effort she made to keep her naturally hot temper within bounds.

"It is false," she cried in a husky voice; "the De Tillyers were old *noblesse*. My husband's grandfather was a refugee. All the family papers were destroyed at the Revolution, and as they could not get back the old property they changed their name to Tyler. It was for his grandfather's political services that my husband got his commission. You are beside yourself with jealousy, Sybella, for you know very well you did all you could to get him for yourself."

"Oh, sisters, sisters," exclaimed the weeping Dulsie, "remember dear father's words, and let there be peace among us. You are

both too angry to know what you are saying ; but I must say, Sybella, that Miss Prance is very scandalous. It was she set the iron-monger origin afloat. I don't believe it. You yourself used to say how well-bred Major Tyler looked."

"Nothing polishes like steel," was the jibing answer. "When the honeymoon is over madame will discover the fact that the major has traded on, that 'there are no fools like old ones,'" and Sybella swept from the room.

"A woman scorned," said Mabella, bursting into tears.

"Oh, dear Mabella," sobbed Dulsie, "go to the Hall at once till she cools down. It would grieve dear father so to hear quarrelling, and she is so bitter. She will never be able to keep quiet. You have been looking ill, and no wonder, with all you have had on your mind. The rest will set you up, and the major will enjoy the conservatory, I am sure ; it is in such beauty now. I'll make you quantities of cuttings, and you can have a farmhouse here ; so don't fret, Mabella, it will

all come right, and it will be so nice to have a brother. But oh, I do trust"—and here Dulsie's hopeful future was suddenly overcast by a very pertinent fear, the outcome of an inner conviction which had not before risen to the surface—"oh, I do hope he will be kind to you," and at the bare possibility of the contrary her tears again flowed.



CHAPTER XV.

“Of all the agonies of life, that which is most poignant and harrowing, that which for the time annihilates reason and leaves our whole organization one lacerated, mangled heart, is the conviction that we have been deceived where we placed all the trust of love.”

IN accordance with her father's arrangements Mabella proceeded to Egbert Hall the following morning, there to await her bridegroom. Tim with his house and her maid Tubbs comprised her suite. But no impatient ardour filled her breast, no thrill of loving excitement passed through her heart. No vision of her handsome, fascinating husband, telling her the tale in the shady walks of the old place he told her by the rippling tide, looking down on her with his wonderful eyes so full of love, rose to cheer her lonely journey, and no reassuring hope of sheltering protection came to console her as the train, rushing on, bore her away for ever from the happy home-life of years full of peace and honour.

A very woeful bride was Mabella. The ignominy of her position had begun to dawn upon her; the terrible folly of her act was already casting portentous shadows on her future.

She felt like an uncertain swimmer out of his depth, distrustful of his skill, and shuddering as the treacherous waters kissed his lips.

The proud blood mounted to her brow as Sybella's words smote on her ear, "his father was an ironmonger."

With all the force of her will she refused them credence; but there is a force stronger than will in the human mind, and that is truth, a force that actively and passively asserts its presence, defying will with its armoury of sophistry and skill of craft to dislodge it.

So the fact these few words, maliciously circulated by Miss Prance, represented, went home straight as an arrow to its aim, and there, in the breast it was meant to wound, it rankled.

In vain Mabella conjured up her whilom lover's ingenious pageantry of De Tillyer

châteaux and fair lands somewhere on the free-flowing Loire, of gallant chevaliers and noble counts, of revolution, destruction, and flight of the brave remnant to an alien shore ; it was but phantasmagoria, without even the shadow of earthly local habitation or name. It had been a stirring, pleasant song in her ear, but even its echo would not ring now, for the unquickened conviction of the truth of her sister's words lay germinating in her heart. That hour's journey was a terrible experience to the deluded woman.

The personal influence that had led her to her fatal act was not present to justify her to herself, neither was its memory strong enough to console her for the loss of her father's respect, or to whisper compensation in the future.

Silently and unchecked her tears flowed, till the little station of Nettlethorp was reached.

Then she hastily dried them and drew her veil down.

Tim, who had been callously sleeping off the effects of a parting feast of stewed kidneys

given him by Judy, stretched himself on her lap and yawned, then sat up in his usual attitude of general aggressiveness, and growled.

Tubbs came to the door with a conscious simper on her face, and Mabella, gathering her favourite to her ample bosom, stepped on to the platform. She started back ; it was lined with a little crowd, not of affectionate well-wishers, but of prying idlers.

Her strange marriage and expected arrival had got wind in the gossiping little country town, by what means it would not have been difficult to trace : the domestic telegraphy of servants is ubiquitous.

Mabella understood it all. She became deadly pale, then drew herself up, and swept on as if in defiance.

The station-master took off his hat with what was meant to be a congratulatory bow, and the porters doffed their caps, expectant of bridal largess.

As she reached the barrier-gate a lad threw up his cap with a shrill "hurrah," which the mob, pressing forward, responded to with a yell.

It required all her strength to keep in the struggling Tim, whose rage was too fierce to admit of more than a gasp for a bark.

“Hurrah for the bride!” they shouted.

“Never too late to mend,” cried a wag.

“The aftermath is the sweetest grass,” roared another, sending up his cap with a whirl.

A dozen caps followed suit, then a cheer as from one voice, drowned by the steam whistle of the starting train.

Mabella’s strength failed her.

Tim leapt to the ground, and with the fury of a baited bull charged the mob.

She turned, like a hunted rabbit, in fascinated fear, and saw, as the train slowly passed out of the station, the windows of the carriages full of inquisitive faces, many of whom, with burning cheeks of shame, she recognized.

In the meantime the versatile crowd had turned their attention to the belligerent Tim, who was not an adversary to be despised. Caps and missiles were thrown at him; some hit, but receding and charging he kept the enemy at bay. It was a free fight, with the advantage on the aggressor’s side.

Then Tubbs was seen elbowing her way through the mass, holding aloft the assailant's house. With it well in front she got between the contending parties, and set it down, face towards its owner. For a minute Tim hesitated, but a bold youth putting his hand on the roof, he dashed into it with a yell of rage, and Tubbs, giving it a vicious shake, carried it off in triumph, Tim growling and snarling to admiration. It was noticeable that though each time this *ruse* was successful, each time Tim recognized that it was a *ruse*. This was evidenced by the subdued quality of his growls when fairly caged. He was ashamed of being tricked.

How Mabella got to the carriage she hardly knew. She had just enough presence of mind preserved to her by her natural pride to acknowledge the station-master's officious assistance with a stiff bow and some words of thanks, and to desire her maid to leave a sovereign for the porters. Then she flung herself back on the seat, first pulling down the blinds, covered her face with her hands, and wept.

But her mortifications were not over. The footman opened the door, and with a well-trained look of impassibility, which seemed to see nothing but the extreme tip of his mistress's nose, he handed her a telegram. It was addressed to "Mrs. Tyler, Egbert Hall."

"The clerk says as it's just come, ma'am, and is there any answer?"

"None, Horne," was the reply.

The contents of the telegram were as follows :

"Major Tyler, London, to Mrs. Tyler, Egbert Hall, Nettlethorp. Hope to join you in a day or two. Detained by business. Will write to-morrow or next day."

For a moment Mabella was conscious of a feeling of relief, the next the callousness of the few careless words struck a chill to her heart, and again she gave way to bitter weeping.

The carriage had drawn up at the venerable postern of the old Hall before Mabella was aware that she had entered the precincts of the place. The loud resonant ring of the great bell sounded like an alarm in her ears.

Never before had she felt shame on entering her father's doors.

The old housekeeper, in the absence at Sandycot of the butler and footman, opened the door to Mabella, and gravely bade "Mrs. Tyler" welcome home. Poor Mabella, already the name sounded ominously in her ear. The housekeeper, Mrs. Carter, was an old family servant and privileged. She led the way to the ante-room of the large drawing-room.

"No," said Mabella, "the boudoir," making as if she would pass on.

"I've put your things in here, ma'am," said Mrs. Carter, "and there's a fine big chair which will just suit the major."

There was a deprecatory tone in the good woman's voice, almost a wheedling one. Mabella looked round sharply, then walked on till she reached the door of the boudoir. It was locked.

"Don't be angry, ma'am," said the housekeeper, "I couldn't help it, it was the squire's orders."

Without a word Mabella retraced her steps and entered the room prepared for her. Her

heart was bursting. She was "outside the nest" now, but she made no sign; only an additional stateliness of carriage and a chill in her manner as she took a small basket from Mrs. Carter's hands told the worthy woman how keenly she felt the incident.

A sudden fear crossed her. Was she to have her old room? She hesitated. Her pride forbade her asking the servant, whose mistress she had been for thirty years. Was she so no longer?—only in the old Hall on sufferance? She threw up her veil and looked Mrs. Carter in the face. The old woman's eyes were full of tears. Then Mabella broke down.

"Oh, Mrs. Carter, Mrs. Carter," she cried, throwing her arms round her neck, forgetting pride, distinctions, all in her deep need of human sympathy; and this to the full she received.

After a long confidential talk, which comforted her not a little, she followed Mrs. Carter to her room, which was the one she had always occupied. It and the house were at her disposal for the time; it was only

the boudoir, which the squire regarded as sacred to his wife's memory, against which his interdict had been placed. For the time also she was still to be mistress.



CHAPTER XVI.

“The caprices of womankind are not limited by any climate or nations.”

It was well at this juncture in the domestic annals of the inmates of Egbert Lodge that Sandycot had the distraction of the coming ball. The marriage, with its accompanying circumstances variously misrepresented—as was natural when only the bare fact was communicated to the public by the parties concerned—was not even a nine days’ wonder. A simple announcement, with no mention of date or place, was made in the *Times*, and as the Egberts, whatever their importance might be in their own county and its borders, were utterly unknown within the magic cordon of London society, the event did not figure in the so-called society papers, dressed in the alluring tights of significant modesty and the delicate tissue of innuendo.

A short paragraph appeared in due course

in the conservative weekly organ of ——shire to the effect that “Major and Mrs. Tyler were spending their honeymoon at Egbert Hall, the ancestral home of the bride.” That was all. The proprietor of the paper was an old business friend of the squire.

The marriage was a severe blow to Mrs. Aylmere. Her acuteness seemed to herself at fault. She had come to Sandycot at considerable personal inconvenience, and with not a little personal disinclination, for the express purpose of preventing a catastrophe which was silently consummated under her very eyes, as it were.

“If only Judy had half my sharpness,” she said to herself, “it never could have happened,” and this, with much bewailing, she told her daughter. But Judy had not thought it necessary or wise to recapitulate to her mother the many suspicious circumstances she had noted at various times, or even to mention the later incident of the *rencontre* at Preene. Had she done so her mother’s estimate of her perspicuity might have risen.

Nor did she confide in her the strange

eventful history of the interpolating major. Judy simply held her tongue. She might have allayed her anxious mother's fears with regard to her future and the Egbert property; a very few words would have sufficed, and it would have gratified her affectionate heart to have done so, but there was one thing that would ever be an impossibility to Judy Aylmere, and that was to betray a friend's confidence. Not that her powers of resisting temptation were above proof, but because the idea of doing so would never occur to her.

With the recuperative power of a buoyant *intrigante*, Mrs. Aylmere resolved to concentrate her strategy for the present in the direction of the member for Oxminster.

Among the intimates of the Egbert circle the marriage made, as was to be expected, a very profound sensation. By all it was regarded as a piece of egregious folly, and the apparent countenance given by the squire was received at its true value.

"The family are wise," was the significant dictum; "they are making the best of a bad job."

Very much real sympathy was felt and expressed for the old squire, and pretty Judy Aylmere's chances in the market matrimonial of needy sons suffered depression.

Among the expected guests at the ball was Miss Le Pole, the aunt of the present Earl of Albany, an old and eccentric lady, the proprietor of that portion of the Egbert estate which had been eliminated from the ancient boundary in the troublous times of the Commonwealth.

Miss Le Pole was singularly deficient in one quality of her noble relative the present earl—family pride. She had been all her life long a woman of fancies, never of affections, but her astuteness had saved her from pitfalls of the nature into which Mabella had fallen. She had always drawn up in time, or the fancy being, like fancies generally, ephemeral in its nature had died the natural death of ephemeræ.

She always spoke of herself as a person without ties, meaning claims, and though she kept on fair terms with her nephew, it could not be said that she evinced

either affection for his person or interest in his children.

But the squire was right when he said that she would not have been averse at one period to have brought back to the Egbert family their coveted acres.

He had been to her a little more perhaps than a passing fancy, she to him nothing but a pleasant friend, very original and amusing ; and the friendship remained, though the fancy died, not, however, the absolute death of its many predecessors, for the scent of the roses hung round it still.

Of late years she had almost given up visiting, though it was understood that she expected invitations on any special occasion to be sent to her. She might choose to drop society, but she had no mind that society should drop her.

Her manner of life was said to be eccentric. She managed the home-farm herself, keeping no steward or responsible functionary of the kind, and as her health was without a flaw she was able to perform the onerous duties with a very satisfactory result to her pocket.

No details were beneath her personal supervision, nor, it was whispered, her manipulation.

She would, with a gingham sun-bonnet and short cotton gown, take a turn in the hayfield, and never a rick was raised without her putting the finishing stroke by combing its fragrant sides with her huge wooden rake.

In her leisure hours she dabbled not a little in science, in which her reading was vast. The knowledge she gathered did not lie fallow in her active brain, and if her experiments were not always successful they were yet in the right direction, and people came to believe that there was something after all in Miss Le Pole's "fads."

One year, when the potato disease was at its height, and farmers planted the tuber with sparing hand, she devoted every available acre to its growth, turning a deaf ear to warning, and, her folks said, a blind eye to facts.

The crop rose strong and healthy till the blossoms began to show, then one night a violent thunderstorm broke, and on the fresh morning air the odour of the blight was borne

to the Manor House, Miss Le Pole's residence. In a short space of time a band of labourers were at work, Miss Le Pole at their head, and before nightfall every haulm lay prone. The farmers far and near and each individual labourer shook their heads and said, "Miss Le Pole is mad," but she took no notice, and when the first frost showed on the uplands, she dug her crop and stored it under cover, without, as she triumphantly said, one black sheep among it.

Some, convinced against their will, sneered at the imperfect development of the tuber, but half a loaf was clearly better than no bread, and the half-loaf brought its owner the price of the whole.

Then it was insinuated, with many a nod and wink, that the old maid was a witch.

The tale of the eggs from the large poultry-yard was each day taken by herself, and the butter, on churning days, weighed by her own hands.

Lord Albany very seldom honoured the Manor House with a visit.

On the occasion, however, of his son's

rejection by Oxminster, he rode over to inform his relative of the humiliating fact.

It was early in the forenoon, and leaving his horse with the groom he walked down to the farm, where the bucolic butler informed him "un vor among the pigs."

And among the pigs she surely was. It was mucking hour, and with a fork, brush and bucket of water she was within one of the styes hard at work. A man and a lad similarly employed were in two others adjoining.

Nothing abashed, she called to her nephew to "stand back, she would be done directly," and sluicing the last bucket of water over the flags she swept it out, filled the sty with clean pease straw, and stepped out.

"You've come to tell me of Le Pole's licking," she cried, declining the earl's proffered hand with a grim smile as she stopped to rinse hers in a trough of water. "I read it all. Some one sent me the *Weekly Sun* and the *People's Spokesman*, and I take the *Daily Telegraph*. That young Rawson's a fine young fellow, a man every inch of him, I'm sure.

You'd better give Le Pole a Cook's ticket and send him round the world to cool his heels. I hate a man who begins life with a failure; a pretty penny this will cost you. I hear you are sending some cattle to the show; you'd much better have got me to look over them first. I don't believe you know a dun cow from a Berkshire pig. But you wouldn't take my advice about Le Pole, so of course you won't about your other live-stock."

Lord Albany was used to rough usage at his eccentric relation's hands; to-day his heart was heavy within him, and he winced. But he could not afford an open rupture.

"My dear aunt," he said quietly, "I shall be only too grateful if you will come to the Grange and take a look at the specimen, Chads," naming his steward, "has selected for exhibition. I am no judge myself, as you know. Louise—Lady Albany—is with me, and the girls. We all feel Le Pole's defeat very keenly; it was so unexpected."

"Which is just the thing that always happens," she replied, a little mollified. "Well, I'll come. I see Louise is patroness

of the Sandycot ball. Only imagine the fools sending me a card!"

Then the earl told her of Miss Egbert's extraordinary marriage, and spoke of the squire as showing symptoms of breaking up.

Miss Le Pole said little, after expressing her opinion that Mabella had always been a fool where a man was in the way, and that the major would very likely be easily bought off—a cool alternative that made her companion stare.

"Are the rest at Sandycot still?" she asked.

"Yes," he replied a little awkwardly. He wished to bring in Judy's name naturally, and he could not. "Yes, Miss Aylmere is with them, a very pretty, intelligent girl."

"Aylmere," she cried, looking sharply round. "Ah, little Judy Aylmere, grown up, I suppose. Some one said she is to have the property some day."

"Yes, I believe she will. It would be a nice thing for Le Pole."

He was not used to give a vital subject a light turn, his voice sounded shaky.

“What, the property or the girl?”

“Both,” and he tried to laugh.

“Ah! When is this ball to be?” she asked.

“Next week.”

“This young Rawson’s to be there, is he not?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll go.”

They had reached the front of the house, and declining his relative’s not very warm invitation to stay to luncheon Lord Albany mounted his horse and took his departure. As he rode he cogitated :

“She wants to see how the land lies. I do believe she hates Le Pole. These low radical papers make a demi-god of this young Rawson. They say the girl likes him. Good heavens! ‘mucking pigs!’ ”



CHAPTER XVII.

“Quick and fine-witted.”

THE new member for Oxminster had written to secure a room at the hotel for the ball, but he was expected the day before the event. There had been some talk about nominating him one of the stewards, but political views were divided in the club, and it was not considered advisable to press the matter. To Lord Le Pole, however, no objection was raised. Whatever his politics might be, he had been defeated, and difference of opinion can be generous at times. He was, moreover, desirable from a social side of the question, so the request was made and graciously granted. In anticipation of his new duties he came to Sandycot two days before that of the ball, and took up his abode at Seapinks as Mrs. Horseman's guest.

At dinner the night of his arrival there

were no strangers save Mrs. Beaumorris. The arrangements gave Elsie Eber on his left, his seat being next that of his hostess. Opposite to him was the far-famed beauty, whom last he had seen in the Row, and against whose charms he was well-seasoned. They recognized each other with apparent pleasure, and at once Creamy resolved to secure her distinguished acquaintance for the first three dances. There could be no conversation beyond a remark or two carried on across the table, but there was *the time after*, and the *twilight*. She had soon though cause for alarm. The "Jew girl," as she usually called the *spirituelle* Elsie, had evidently attractions for the fastidious young man, and he seemed to have equal attractions for her. Their conversation was animated, and it was—she could catch some sentences—what she termed blue. Now and again she caught the name of Aylmere, and she knew that the little rustic Judy was under discussion.

"He's used to me," she said to herself, "I'll set La Belle Catty at him. She will be a new

sensation, a thing Le Pole is always alive to : men, particularly *blasé* men, are such fools where bread-and-butter misses are concerned. Catty will wake him up though."

Mrs. Horseman had a headache ; she was glad to leave most of the talk to Elsie. Creamy, who was naturally silent, depending on her eyes and smiles for her part in dialogue, did not care to be talked to save by men. Mr. Horseman was *distract*, now and then holding desultory chat with his eyes.

When dinner was ended he said to Elsie as she looked out on the sea from the balcony, the animated colour still tinging the delicate olive of her cheek, and in her brilliant eyes "thought too deep for tears :"

"Elsie, friend, what animated you so at dinner ?"

"What Miss Sybella Egbert calls swearing—meaning politics," she replied with a smile.

"Poor Creamy ! It was hard on her," he said, "but she is making up her way. Ah, the profession"—he looked at her liberal languishes and prodigal glances—"is an arduous

one. Do you think, fair spirit, there is so little of this mundane flesh about you? Do you think a woman of beauty can ever be a woman of soul?"

"You ask that, owning the wife you do?
Ingrate!"

She spoke with a serio-comic air.

"My wife," he said, looking with mingled pride and love at the fair stately form bending at the moment over a vase of flowers, "my wife is not a woman of beauty; she is simply a beautiful woman. If nature had not moulded her features in symmetry, the spirit within would have made her face perfect in loveliness. But I don't think she'd sell in the windows. There, look at that; that's the sort of thing that goes."

Elsie looked in the direction indicated. Lord Le Pole was standing aside to let Creamy pass out to the balcony. He held back the lace curtain, but she had come to an abrupt stand; her lovely arms were raised on high, her palms joined in adoration, her head was thrown well back, but inclining to one side, and her great lustrous eyes, full of

dreamy languor, were gazing outwards in silent ecstasy.

"What is it?" whispered Elsie. "What is she doing?"

"Looking at the moon," said Mr. Horseman.

A servant brought Lord Le Pole a note. It was from the squire. A shade of annoyance passed over his face as he read it.

"Mr. Egbert wishes to know," he said, speaking to Mr. Horseman, "if it is true that my aunt, Miss Le Pole, is coming to the ball, as if so he should wish her to be his guest. Whoever proposed to ask her? I don't believe she'll come; it is preposterous."

At that instant Mrs. Trelawney and Mr. Green were announced.

"Such a kick-up, my dear," she said as, shaking hands with Mr. Horseman, she sank into an easy-chair, nodding to the rest of the company. "Take a peach, Mr. Green," she said, observing with a side glance that her bashful convoy was hesitating whether to lean against the corner of the pianoforte, or come to anchor on the stool. "Such a kick-up,"

she repeated. "Mr. Barnes, the hotel-keeper, you know, came into the room just as the admiral was settling down to his afternoon nap, and coolly asked him if he would give up his dressing-room to Miss Le Pole; every room is full, it seems, and as the Albany family are coming, he doesn't like to refuse their aunt. Poor Mr. Barnes"—she stopped to laugh—"I heard him run downstairs as if from a mad dog; the admiral is always dangerous when half asleep. 'A lady from the North Pole in my room!' he shouted, catching at a decanter."

All laughed, and Creamy, forgetting to pose, joined in the chorus.

"It was some time before I got him fairly asleep, and then I went to see if there was a vacant room to be had in Mr. Beaumorris's lodgings, but there isn't. The town is full. So as I met Miss Prance, who, I verily believe, is in the air—she knows everything—and she told me that Lord Le Pole had arrived and was here, I came on to see if he could suggest anything short of the dressing-room."

"I haven't been at Egbert Lodge since the

marriage," said Creamy to Mrs. Trelawney. "It is awkward, not knowing whether to congratulate or condole."

"Oh, I went next day," was the rattling answer. "It's always the best way to appear unconscious of any misadventure in a family. I thought Sybella rather bristly, but I was sorry, and poor Dulsie"—she laughed—"she looked like a large cabbage-rose that had been cut the day before and forgotten to be put in water—the least shake and I am sure she would have fallen to pieces. The squire was out, but the bright little Judy was in, and talked and laughed to draw off my attention from her cousin's forlorn aspect. She is a pretty creature, don't you think so, Lord Le Pole?" she added, crossing behind Creamy and bringing up beside that gentleman, who was walking on the beauty's left.

"Well, she is what some people would call pretty," was the cautious reply. "She is not very tall, I think."

"Oh, inches have nothing to do with beauty. There's Miss Eber, she does not come up to my shoulder, and somehow I always feel small

beside her. You're not to say so tall yourself. What do you measure?"

"About five feet ten, I believe."

"Ah, shouldn't have thought so," she said carelessly; "but then you have a poke. What a fine soldier-like looking young man Mr. Rawson is, quite six feet, I should say—but I forgot you were rivals; *are* still, if rumour is true."

Lord Le Pole flushed angrily, but a glance at the lovely Catty's arch good-humoured face dissipated his annoyance, and he gave himself up to the *persiflage* of the moment. Catty's lively banter, silvery voice, mischievous eyes and sparkling beauty were weapons to which the male sex generally, without even a show of fight, ground their arms at the moment. There was no malice in her fun, no deeper intent than the making of gay music to speed the bright hours of an aimless existence. Catty was too brilliant to be deep. Her infectious gaiety, her daring challenges to open flirtations, her venturous unconventionality, yet withal her air of perfect good breeding, which made acts that in some would have

been mere solecisms charming *divertissements*, all combined to form a very bewildering whole, but, as the admiral knew to his cost, did not blend felicitously in a wife. Men at large, she audaciously proclaimed, were her compensation for the uncongenial one particular and necessitous circumstances had made her portion. She was withal gentle and attentive to her *disparate* partner, whose jealousy and querulousness increased with his feebleness.

“Rivalry,” said Le Pole, connecting the beauties with a meaning glance, “is the appetizing sauce of society.”

“A relish,” said Creamy indifferently, “that has only lately appealed to your lordship’s palate. Do you like it?” And she gave him a languishing look, as if in deprecation of the keen darts levelled at him by the gay Catty.

“At the time I did. It is good for a man to be put on his mettle.”

“But not to be put in the shade,” whispered Catty.

“Lights eclipse each other,” he replied,

bowing to each. "I hope mine, though, is only a partial eclipse."

"I fear for you, noble seigneur," said Catty lightly, but significantly. "Politics and love are alike in one thing: a middle course in either is fatal to success; and remember, 'Everything is fair in love and war,' as the gallant major thought. A start is difficult to make up though, and inches *are* against you."

She gave a rippling laugh and fell behind.

"Mrs. Trelawney is fond of enigmas," observed Le Pole, not a little ruffled.

"And so you ought to be," said Creamy as they crossed the soft lawn of Egbert Lodge, "for woman is an enigma."

"Not all," he whispered with an admiring glance, which Creamy returned in warmer kind, light fencing on her part to keep her tools in order, and on his *pour passer le temps*.

There was no Tim to give warning of coming steps, so the party, with the privilege of intimacy, coming round by the garden of Egbert Lodge, crossed the soft lawn and stood before the open drawing-room windows before the inmates were aware of their approach.

There seemed a commotion within. The squire was sitting in an easy-chair, by his side a reading-lamp, his country paper in his hand. He was leaning back, his spectacles pushed upon his brow, and watching with a smile Judy's manœuvres. These were lively. Sybella was active and apparently amiable, and Dulsie looked on with quiet enjoyment; a maid, kneeling on the ground, was finishing the unpacking of a large milliner's box which had just arrived from London. A portion of its contents were at different points of vantage in the room.

"It's the ball-dresses," whispered Creamy. "They're so busy they don't see us."

"Just look at Judy," said Mrs. Horseman. "It is as good as a play."



CHAPTER XVIII.

“Jog on, jog on the footpath’s way
And merrily trent the style—a;
A merry mart goes all the way,
Your sad tires in a will—a.”

“In many ways does the full heart reveal
The presence of the love it would conceal.”

THEY looked at Judy. She had caught from the reverent arms of the maid a recumbent skirt of soft white gauze, and was arranging it on a tall pole-screen. With light touches she pulled out the sheeny drapery and sent with an airy fling the long train on the crimson carpet. It was covered with bouquets of forget-me-nots and maidenhair ferns, connected here and there by trailing grasses. Not a word escaped her lips. Then she got the bodice, a soft sunny white nest, with one great bouquet in front and lighter ones on the full flimsy sleeves. This she arranged above the skirt, and then tripping a few steps backwards made the dress a series of low

obeisances in exaggerated homage. Next she flew to the squire and gave him a hug and a kiss, and then she pounced on the solid Dulsie, who was admiring a wonderful head-gear of feathers and golden-hued pansies, holding it at arm's length, and embraced her as she stood. Lastly she seized on Sybella, who was pushing aside an unopened box on which was a card directed to "Miss Egbert," and kissed her with such a will that softness and smiles for the moment made her usually acrid visage very pleasant to look upon.

Her pantomime over, Judy, her eyes sparkling with moisture, cried :

"Oh, thank you all a thousand times! You are all so good—so good to me. But I'll never get a partner; they'll all be afraid to ask me. Oh, Dulsie dear, won't you change with me?" and in a minute she had placed the erection of mammoth pansies and spiral plumes on her head, and had slipped into, as if she were going to hide, a voluminous and wide-spreading skirt of cardinal satin. It was as if a frolicsome fay had suddenly sprung up in the bosom of a luscious

peony rose and was about to wing its flight upwards.

“Here, Culton,” cried Sybella, calling her maid, “put mine back in the box, please. Miss Judy’s off her head,” and Culton, with careful hand, replaced the black net and satin combination with which, relieved by waterlilies, Sybella had a mind to compete with Sandycot fashion.

In the meantime Judy had advanced to the window, followed by Dulsie, who, laughing, caught her by the train and brought her to a stand. Doing this her eyes fell on the window, and she gave a little scream, then hurried forward and opened the glass doors. At the same moment the butler brought in the large silver lamp, and setting it down proceeded to light the wax candles in the sconces. The room was a blaze of light as the formidable party from Seapinks trooped in. Judy was fairly caught; there was no receding. She stood covered with confusion and vexation, almost inclined to cry. The merry laughter which arose on all sides did not help to compose her.

“He’ll think me such an idiot; it’s the second time I’ve made a guy of myself for his express benefit, and I daren’t open my mouth, I’d only be twice as absurd. I wish some one would set me on fire, or that a board would give way and I could disappear into the cellar. What a tarnation donkey I am!”

Poor Judy’s disjointed reflections did not relieve her sensibly. She stood in her splendid cage, with a very woe-begone visage, oscillating between a smile and a cry.

Culton, at Dulsie’s instance, came to her relief, and proceeded to disrobe her. Elsie lent a hand.

“Perfect!” said Creamy, posing in an attitude of admiration. “A little powder and an additional yard or so of girth and *voilà la petite* Judy twenty years hence a charming dowager.”

“Take comfort, Miss Aylmere,” cried Catty, proceeding to inspect the skirt pendent on the pole screen. “I’ve got *la spirituelle* Creamy’s secret for keeping under the flesh, and you shall have it. She has tested it well for—

how many years, dear?—twenty did you say?”

Creamy passed for on the borders of thirty; she was thirty-five.

“No, ten, love,” was the soft answer. “You are thinking of the one I promised to get you for keeping down bone.”

By this time the gay cardinal dress had been carried off, and Culton had come for Judy’s white one. An animated discussion on its merits was being carried on, in which its owner did not join. She had not recovered her equanimity. She stood apart, slightly pouting.

“I am so glad it is your favourite flower,” said a low rich voice in her ear.

She looked up almost appealingly.

And she had read all those dry books for nothing. He’d think her a “bigger noodle” than ever, and she wasn’t fat, never would be—how spiteful women were! Then her eyes met his, and somehow she felt comforted. They did not look as if they were quizzing her. There was something deeper than amusement in their meaning; a questioning some-

thing. Oh, she did wish he'd ask her which she was now, liberal or conservative, and she'd soon show him she wasn't the little brainless goose he perhaps had been told she was, and Ned thought she was ; but he'd find out his mistake, too.

"What flower?" she asked, scarcely knowing what she asked.

"Forget-me-not," he whispered, and then adroitly intervening his person between the beauties and Judy he showed her the little sprig he had picked up at her feet the night of their last meeting. He had worn it, he told her, as his colours during the turbulent contest in which he had come off loser. It was a tiny, shrivelled, colourless atom now, but Judy recognized it.

"It brought you ill-luck," she faltered. "I was so"—and then she stopped, she could not, in loyalty to her old friend Ned, say she was sorry—"so interested in the contest," she continued ; "but you'll easily get another seat, won't you?"

He shook his head.

"Were you very much disappointed?"

"Yes; I had been led to believe I was certain to win."

"Was it all fair?" she asked.

"No, that's the sting. I don't think it was. I can't understand it, but I didn't like Mr. Rout from the first."

Elsie was standing near. She started, and her sad eyes lit up with a sudden intelligence that seemed to add years to her face. It was as if a dormant fear had awakened to dreaded vitality.

Then the squire was told of Miss Le Pole's difficulty about a room at the hotel, and declining to depute another to offer her his hospitality he retired to his study and indited her a note of old-fashioned courtesy, inviting her to the Lodge for the festive occasion, and expressing a hope that they were not too much out of date to tread a measure together; "not an archaic minuet," he said, "but Sir Roger de Coverley, which, in the country at any rate, would keep the boards as long as dancing did."

In the meantime the rest of the party, except Dulsie, who feared the dew, adjourned

for a stroll on the beach. Notwithstanding certain feminine manœuvres, Le Pole fell to Judy's lot, and the twain, unconscious of provoking remark, soon left their more mature companions far behind. Elsie had slipped away homewards, unobserved.

A silvery night by the sea, a night by the silvery sea. No fading gleams of golden sunlight scattered pale rose-leaves on the sky, clothed the sentinel cliffs in the distance with their delicate livery, or flushed the still water that, almost waveless, lapped the shore. Evening's faint hands had folded aside the twilight's "purple-skirted robe," and now in dim vesture of chilly gray was herself stealing silently away before the majesty of chilly night.

For night—the great moon her regal herald—struck a glittering pathway on the sea, and the myriad stars set her glory in the heavens. The voice of silence filled the earthly firmament, which never yet has caught an echo from the music of the spheres. And the ocean, coldly responsive, scintillated and shimmered as it gave back the splendour and the glitter.

The tide was slowly ebbing. It had not long turned, and the light, springy feet that, all unheeding, dipped in the shallow flow, left their imprint deep in the soft sand, leaving as they hastened onwards tiny pools as a watery track behind.

Judy's face was to the sea, and yet her bright, animated eyes never once cast a glance on its gently heaving breast, tremulous as if with its weight of diamonds. Her ears, too, which loved to drink in its murmur and plaint, heard not even the hushed rhythm of the ripples; a deeper music filled them, the music of a voice which had found an echo in her innermost heart. And to Le Pole's eyes that night only one star shone—the fair, pure maiden by his side; and only one sound filled the air—the ringing melody of her voice. What did they talk of? Not of men or of women, but of things. The opening bud of the girl's mind turned instinctively to his for light and nourishment, and its rare beauty expanded beneath his glad bounty.

Elsie had hinted to him something of the studies in her little sanctum, but he was too

wise to scare what he felt to be the delicate confidences of a soul hungering after knowledge, by appearing conscious of the elementary nature of its acquirements. Not the crudest proposition she ventured drew from him even a smile. Gravely and tenderly he gave her his best, spreading at her eager feet from his well-garnered stores of learning. Her keen remarks and shrewd wisdom told him it was the intelligence of no common order that thus sought further enlightenment. They talked of the contest that had ended so disappointingly for him, but he uttered not one disparaging word of his rival; said indeed that, man to man, the fight had been fair, and that, if there had been underhand work, it had not been at Mr. Rawson's instance.

Of himself and his prospects he said very little, only that he should seek the first opportunity to obtain a seat elsewhere. He had no enthusiastic future to sketch to the ears that would have been willing to listen. He was no theoretical philanthropist, he said, had never been bit by a mission, and was not

sure if he had a vocation ; but he thought he should be ready to do any work laid out for him of which his conscience approved. It did not much matter if it were congenial or not, so that it fitted his moral needs. As a matter of fact, very little real, hard, human work was of a congenial nature to any one, but they could make it so. The same principle attached to study. Much of the study requisite for wide culture was sure to be uncongenial to particular minds, but the habit of concentration invested all subjects with a certain interest. So, should he be fortunate enough to be received by another constituency, he should hold himself as bound as he was ready to be something more than a mere voting member of the House.

So talking, they had walked quite two miles before they thought of looking back, and then so far in the distance were the rest they found they were virtually alone.

The last fraction of twilight had merged in the full light of the summer night ; a great loveliness brooded on the shore. Judy started back, afraid of the shadow she cast on the

wet shining sands and almost ashamed before her companion.

"What will they think of me?" she cried artlessly. "I did not mean to run away, did you?" But he said he did, and Judy bit her lip. "You'll come back quick, won't you? I don't like vexing Sybella. I do think Elsie might have kept up with us, don't you?"

Le Pole said he was of a different opinion, that he thought Miss Eber, as Judy had assured him she was, one of the very wisest women he had ever known.

So Judy considered the matter and held her peace.

"Now don't talk any more," she said in real distress; "just peg away—oh, I mean walk away."

"No; am I to go?"

"Please don't tease, you have been so nice, and I don't like chaff. Yes, I said *chaff*," noting just a little twitch of Le Pole's mouth. "It's not a *comme il faut* word, I know, any more than 'peg' is, but out-of-the-way expressions have sometimes so much in them, correct

ones seem quite tame beside them. So I tell you I don't like chaff. Ned—that is, Mr. Rawson—chaffs.”

“Then I'll never be guilty of it again,” he said quietly.

She fired up ; her mood had changed. She was angry at herself for giving occasion to the remarks which she knew would be made, and half inclined to be angry with her aider and abettor, she was so femininely unreasonable.

“Why shouldn't you, if *you are able* ?” she said saucily. “It requires a very clever person to chaff well, I can tell you. Ned does.”

“So does Mrs. Trelawney,” he added. “Do you think we might get up a match between them ?”

She looked sharply up in his face, then suddenly dropped her eyes and shot ahead.

“We shall never overtake them,” she cried ; then she began to run. A few steps brought him up to her.

“I should take the thing quieter,” he managed to say as he doubled, in military phrase. She flitted lightly and swiftly on-

wards. "If they see you put out, it will make matters worse."

A thought struck her.

"You think me undignified," she said, coming so suddenly to a stop he was some steps in advance before he could pull up. "But it is so provoking; they might have kept up with us. I am sure they are quite as good walkers as we are."

She had reduced her pace to a smart walk.

There was silence for a few seconds. They were nearing their party fast. Each person was distinguishable now. Judy felt reassured, she put on a nonchalant air.

"Miss Aylmere," said Le Pole in a low rich voice.

She turned to him smiling, her petulance all gone. The dreamy stillness around, the fervid languor of night, its tranquil splendour and soft air, soothed her spirit. Her heart-strings vibrated to his tones; perhaps her eyes betrayed her. The spell was on him, too. Their paths drew closer together. Insensibly her hand, which hung by her side, touched his.

"Miss Aylmere," he said—he did not dare to call her Judy—"you will give me the first three dances, won't you?"

She whispered assent, but the next moment, breaking from the spell, she started asunder from him, saying, almost in an accent of fear:

"Oh, I forgot, I can't. I promised Ned—Mr. Rawson—the first dance of my first ball, and this will be my first."

"Then the two next?" he said, and she nodded.

From the distance came the ten o'clock bells.

"Ah, how the time has gone," she cried.

"Has it gone?" he asked. "Does anything ever really go that lives in memory?"

With a sudden impulse, repented of the next moment, she whispered:

"Nobody ever spoke to me as you have done," then, rallying, added, "except Elsie; but then Elsie is an angel."

"*Imprimis*," he said mischievously, "I am one, too."

"Yes," she said simply, "if you are not particular as to the colour of your plumage."

But Judy had vexed herself needlessly.

Sybella uttered no reproof, nor did any of the party exercise their wit at her expense. The situation had been wholly pleasing to the former, and the latter were too well bred to openly make her the subject of raillery. The neglected beauties, however, would have been more than human had they quite ignored the defection of the sole attraction that had drawn them on this late stroll to the deserted, and therefore to them deadly uninteresting, beach. So Catty, who had the keener wit, sent a double-barbed arrow straight home, smiling softly as she drew her bow.

“Good-night, Miss Aylmere,” she said, “I thought monopolies belonged only to Mr. Rawson’s programme.”

Lord Le Pole, standing aside, was supposed to be out of hearing.

Creamy came up with outstretched hand in adieux. She caught her rival’s drift, and with Judy’s hand in hers she said in a stage whisper :

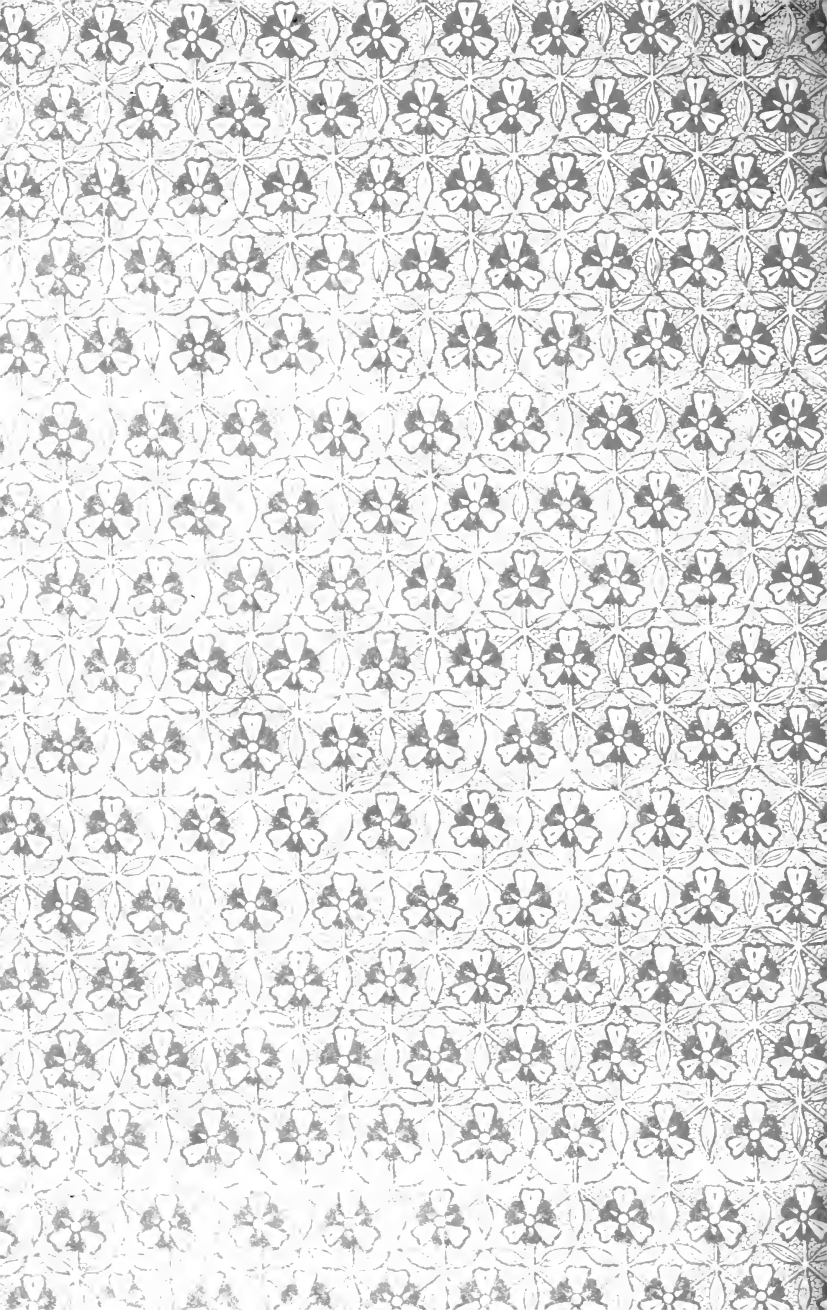
“Very possibly, but, you know, a good leader ‘educates his party.’”

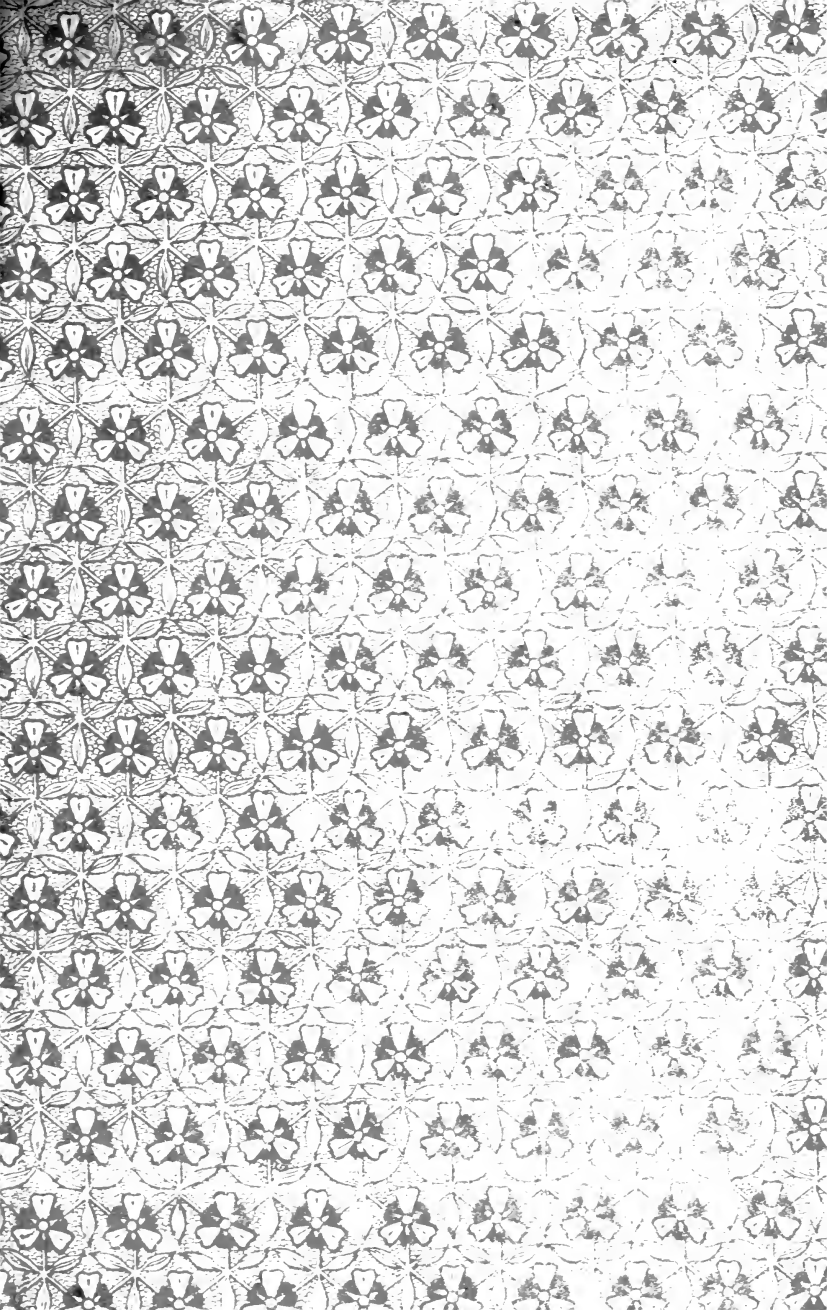
Judy, whose equanimity had been quite restored, in a moment and with the most *impayable* air imaginable returned :

“Oh dear no ; it was only a new departure.”

Lord Le Pole convoyed the beauties home, but they found the exclusive exquisite singularly heavy in hand.







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